

1 CHRIST ON THE CROOKED CROSS, PART I

Jesus as an Aryan, Antisemitic Warrior

1.1 Introduction

When establishing the importance of Jesus for Hitler, it is necessary to understand that Hitler expressed his admiration for Jesus with a rather remarkable consistency over time. Many sources show this to be a fact. But it is equally important to understand what characteristics Hitler (and many other antisemites both before and contemporary with him) ascribed to Jesus to properly interpret what role Jesus played within his worldview. These characteristics ascribed to Jesus were also consistent over time. In this chapter, therefore, I will present the background to the development of this view, which Hitler did not originate, to set the stage for the rest of the book.

1.2 Like a Foolish Man Who Built His House on Sand

Friedrich Tomberg has somewhat contradictorily claimed that while Hitler strove to “in a way” eradicate Christianity from history and replace the mainstream Christian view of Jesus with one where the latter had been transformed into an Aryan, Hitler also at the same time explicitly claimed that the NSDAP continued in “Jesus’ footsteps” with the intention of finally achieving the aim that Jesus had originally set for himself and the world.¹ I write “contradictorily” because it is hard to

¹ Tomberg, F., *Das Christentum . . .*, pp. 14, 115.

understand why Hitler would have had any interest at all in turning Jesus the Jew into Jesus the Aryan if his intention was to eradicate Christianity. Viewing this as a propaganda trick designed to win over millions of Christian voters to the side of National Socialism does not hold water. If that was Hitler's intention, then it would of course have been much easier, and less time-consuming, to simply adopt a mainstream Christian understanding of Jesus as a tool for getting away with that trick. The fact that Hitler had a divergent view of what Christianity really was, and of who Jesus was, and that National Socialism spent so much time and energy on trying to spread this view shows us that we should at least consider taking these claims seriously. Tomberg's investigation is also flawed in the sense that he uses only a small fraction of the available modern scholarship about Hitler and National Socialism's relationship to Christianity. This means that his conclusions are often dubious and untrustworthy.

In his book, Tomberg further undermines his own arguments by explicitly stating that he does not intend to show "what actually happened." The book is instead intended to be a philosophical and literary interpretation, and he says that it is up to the historians to show whether the view that he presents is commensurate with reality.² This attitude is also evident in the way that Tomberg treats his sources, which is almost completely void of source criticism, and the critical methods that he does apply are flawed and invalid. For example, he refers to *Tischgespräche* without mentioning that the quality of this source had not been established at the time.³ He uses Rauschning's *Gespräche mit Hitler* (Conversations with Hitler) from 1940, even though he admits that historians do not think they are genuine; he apparently thinks that he can cite this source anyway because he "corroborates" what Rauschning says using "other" sources (it is unclear which sources he is referring to).⁴ Moreover, he refers to the so-called Bormann dictations (Tomberg is referring to *Hitlers politisches Testament*, or *The Testament of Adolf Hitler*), which are said to be continuations of the conversations in *Tischgespräche*, quoting them extensively, even though he has already noted that historians have

² Ibid., p. 17.

³ Ibid., p. 64. The quality of this source has only recently been established.

⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

doubted the veracity of this source too (I have since proven that these notes are forgeries).⁵ On another occasion, he cites Hitler based on Dietrich Eckart's book *Der Bolschevismus von Moses bis Lenin* (Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin) without mentioning that this is a fictional conversation fabricated by Eckart.⁶ We therefore cannot look to Tomberg to get a reliable description of Hitler's ideas about Jesus and Christianity.

1.3 The Long Tradition of Christian Socialism and Jesus Worship in National Socialism

The idea of Jesus as a fighter and champion for National Socialist ideals and principles was not something that Hitler or the NSDAP concocted. It in fact had a long tradition within German Christian conservative circles already by 1920. A central figure in the early development of this line of thought was the Protestant pastor and politician Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919). He had become very influenced by the court chaplain Adolf Stoecker (1878–1918), the founder of the antisemitic Christian Social Workers' Party (*Christlich-Soziale Arbeiterpartei*), in the early 1880s and his approach to addressing the so-called social question, which was the bourgeois retort to Marxism. The social question was about how to manage social relations in the age of industrialism in a way that would counter the Social Democratic agitation of the day. The solution was to offer an alternative based on an ethical, and explicitly antimaterialist, Christian ideology. It was a purposeful effort to hijack the term "Socialism" and to redefine it in a way that suited a right-wing political agenda. Albrecht Tyrell notes that Naumann explicitly considered himself to be a socialist on the right.⁷

Naumann was explicitly mentioned as a forerunner of National Socialism in NSDAP ideologue Rudolf Jung's book *Der nationale*

⁵ Ibid., p. 71. For it being a forgery, see Nilsson, M., *Hitler Redux* . . . , pp. 279–339.

⁶ Tomberg, F., *Das Christentum* . . . , p. 21.

⁷ Tyrell, Albrecht, *Vom "Trommler" zum "Führer": Der Wandel von Hitlers Selbstverständnis zwischen 1919 und 1924 und die Entwicklung der NSDAP* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1975), pp. 18–19; Kedar, A., "National Socialism before Nazism . . .," pp. 26–27. Naumann is cited and translated by Kedar.

Sozialismus from 1922.⁸ Jung was a Sudeten German refugee from Bohemia and a member of the Austrian parliament representing the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (DAP – German Workers’ Party), which was formed in 1910 and renamed the *Deutsche Nationalsozialistischen Arbeiterpartei* (DNSAP – German National Socialist Workers’ Party) in 1918. It is Jung who has been credited with being the one who suggested to Hitler to include “National Socialist” in the party’s name. Hitler, on the other hand, apparently had the more combative “Social Revolutionary Party” in mind originally.⁹ But the term “revolutionary” did not suit the taste of Anton Drexler, founder of the DAP, which was the party Hitler would later lead.¹⁰ After the creation of Czechoslovakia in the wake of the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian double monarchy after the First World War, the DNSAP set up one branch office in Vienna led by Walter Riehl and one in the Sudetenland under Jung. It makes sense to think that Jung and the DNSAP were the inspirational sources for the creation of the new name NSDAP because it occurred shortly after the Munich National Socialists in the DAP/DNSAP had

⁸ Jung, Rudolf, *Der nationale Sozialismus: seine Grundlagen, sein Werdegang und seine Ziele*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Deutscher Volksverlag, Dr. E. Boepple, 1922), p. 66. This was a rewritten version (more than doubled in size) of a work that Jung had published in 1919 under the title *Der nationale Sozialismus: eine Erläuterung seiner Grundlagen und Ziele* (Tyrell, A., *Vom “Trommler”* . . . , p. 250 n266). Jung obviously felt he had to expand on his book after Hitler had become the leader of the NSDAP and once a party program was available.

⁹ Kuehnelt-Leddin, Erik R. von, “The Bohemian Background of German National Socialism: The D.A.P., D.N.S.A.P., and N.S.D.A.P.,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1948), p. 356. One could of course be skeptical about this information, which is based on an article by Konrad Heiden from 1933 and which seems rather anecdotal. It is also not mentioned in the main biographies of Hitler, although it is mentioned in Heiden’s biography from 1936 of course (Heiden, K., *Hitler* . . . [Vol. I], pp. 125–126). But it was apparently corroborated by Nazi lawyer, NSDAP member, and propagandist Hans Fabricius (from 1933 onward the personal adjutant to Reich Minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick) in his book *Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung* in 1937 (pp. 125–126, n72). Tyrell does not mention this in his otherwise very diligent work, and neither do Joachim Fest, Ian Kershaw, Peter Longerich, Volker Ullrich, or Thomas Weber. Sven Felix Kellerhoff does refer to this, however, but he does not mention Jung specifically and bases the information on Heiden (Kellerhoff, Sven Felix, *Die NSDAP: Eine Partei und ihre Mitglieder* [Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2017], p. 49).

¹⁰ Heiden, K., *Hitler* . . . (Vol. I), p. 126. Toland tells another tale, according to which Drexler had suggested the name “German National Socialist Workers’ Party” already at the founding meeting of the DAP in January 1919, but that the meeting objected that “the word ‘socialist’ might be misinterpreted” (Toland, John, *Adolf Hitler* [New York: Doubleday & Company, 1976], pp. 85–86).

visited Salzburg for a joint international National Socialist meeting. Add to this the fact that the DNSAP had begun using the swastika in May 1918, a symbol that the NSDAP also started using after the name change.¹¹

It may not be a coincidence that Jung rewrote history in his book, the third edition of which he dedicated to “Adolf Hitler and his own,” and claimed that the party that had been founded on January 5, 1919, was not the German Workers’ Party (DAP) but the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP).¹² Jung visited Hitler in the Landsberg fortress¹³ (in Landsberg am Lech) on April 5, 1924, and was in fact among the people that spent the longest time speaking to Hitler (they spoke for one hour). This tells us that Jung was certainly

¹¹ Bullock, A., *Hitler* . . . , pp. 59–60. Interestingly, we do not know exactly how the NSDAP came to appropriate the swastika or even when they used it for the first time. The swastika was not an all-that-uncommon symbol within *völkisch* circles, however, and it was also used by the Munich-based *Thule Gesellschaft* (Thule Society). But it does not seem as if *Thule Gesellschaft* was the main inspiration after all, since they then ought to have adopted it much earlier (after all, DAP cofounder Karl Harrer was a member of this society). Kershaw states that the NSDAP started to use the swastika in mid-1920, which would mean that it occurred simultaneously with the change of name. Strangely, Kershaw accepts Hitler’s claim in *Mein Kampf* that the latter designed the new party emblem (Kershaw, I., *Hitler 1889–1936* . . . , p. 147). It makes sense that Hitler would be too narcissistic and too stubbornly proud to ever admit that it was plagiarized from the DNSAP. The first known leaflet from the NSDAP (although the police report still referred to the party as the DAP), printed sometime before April 12, 1920, did *not* contain a swastika, and neither did the prior invitation to the Hitler and Dingfelder evening at the Hofbräuhaus on February 24, 1920. An NSDAP admission slip from December 1920 does not contain this symbol either. Not even an NSDAP membership book from 1921 had the swastika on it. The certificate of debt for the purchase of the *Völkischer Beobachter* in December 1920, however, *does* contain the swastika (a row of swastikas frame the document), and on January 5, 1921, the newly founded local NSDAP group in Esslingen (completely on their own accord, it seems) used it too on a leaflet (I want to thank Sven Felix Kellerhoff for sharing his deep knowledge of this topic with me, as well as some pictures of early NSDAP documents from various German archives [in an email dated August 15, 2021]). Regarding the Esslinger Ortsgruppe, see Kellerhoff, S. F., *Die NSDAP* . . . , p. 56. It appears therefore that the adoption occurred *after* the name change but that the usage of the swastika, much like the usage of the new name NSDAP, was rather unorganized and perhaps even a bit spontaneous. This is yet another subject, it would seem, that Hitler lied about in *Mein Kampf*.

¹² Jung, R., *Der nationale Sozialismus* . . . , p. 70. Jung committed suicide in Prague in 1945.

¹³ The term “fortress” does not signify a particular form of fortification but rather a particular form of incarceration for those convicted of the crime of high treason (Weber, T., *Becoming Hitler* . . . , p. 307).

a central person in the NSDAP at this time.¹⁴ After the visit, Jung wrote a newspaper article in which he compared Hitler to none other than Jesus.¹⁵ This is even more interesting when we consider the fact that Jung celebrated Jesus in *Der nationale Sozialismus*. Jung stated that “one of the most important demands of the National Socialist doctrines” was the “moral renewal of our people” and the “development of its religious life according to the German spirit.” Jesus was portrayed as standing in total contradiction to the Jews, and Jung stressed that Jesus had condemned the Jewish God Jahveh as being Satan, referring to John 8:44, where Jesus says to the Pharisees: “You belong to your father, the Devil” (NIV). He also remarked that Jesus had not founded a church or a cast of priests, and proclaimed that the “centralism” within “the Roman and Bible-believing Lutheran Church is the explicitly Jewish trait in church Christianity.”¹⁶ Another one of the Austrian DNSAP’s leading figures that saw Hitler as a Christ-like leader was one of its cofounders, Walter Riehl, who also was a sort of ideological inspiration for Hitler after Eckart’s death. Riehl thought of himself as a John the Baptist whose task it was to prepare the way for “Hitler the Savior.”¹⁷

Although he was an antisemite, Stoecker (Naumann’s inspiration) did not go as far as to claim that Jesus was not a Jew. He could accept Jesus’ Jewishness, because he was not a racial antisemite. He was against the Jews because of their rejection of Jesus and viewed the struggle against the Jews in spiritual and not racial terms

¹⁴ Fleischmann, Peter, *Hitler als Häftling in Landsberg am Lech 1923/24: Der Gefangenen-Personalakt Hitler nebst weiteren Quellen aus der Schutzhaft-, Untersuchungshaft-, und Festungshaftanstalt* (Neustadt: Verlag PH. C. W. Schmidt, 2015), pp. 44, 55, 251. Othmar Plöckinger writes that Jung visited Hitler also in January 1924 while Hitler was still in jail awaiting trial, but no documentation of that visit has been found (Plöckinger, Othmar, *Geschichte eines Buches: Adolf Hitlers “Mein Kampf” 1922–1945. Eine Veröffentlichung des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte*, 2nd updated ed. (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 2011), p. 32; Fleischmann, P., *Hitler als Häftling . . .*, pp. 35, 244). In 1936, a Social Democratic anti-Nazi pamphlet by Alexander Stein called “Adolf Hitler: Schüler der Weisen von Zion” (“Adolf Hitler, a Student of the Elders of Zion”) claimed that it was Jung rather than Eckart that had turned Hitler into a rabid antisemite (Heer, F., *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler . . .*, p. 303). The point here is not whether this is true or not, but that Jung was seen as important enough by people in the 1930s for this to possibly be true.

¹⁵ Longerich, P., *Hitler . . .*, p. 140. ¹⁶ Jung, R., *Der nationale Sozialismus . . .*, pp. 86–87.

¹⁷ Pyta, Wolfram, *Hitler: Der Künstler als Politiker und Feldherr. Eine Herrschaftsanalyse* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2015), pp. 116–117.

(this view was common also among Hitler's closest supporters, which was why people such as his benefactor, Elsa Bruckmann, simultaneously had Jewish friends and saved some of them from being murdered in the Holocaust).¹⁸ He feared that those who saw this issue in purely racial terms ran the risk of reaching for hate and brutality, which would hurt Christians more than the Jews. There were several strands of thought about Jesus circulating within the German theological and philosophical spheres already during the 1870s and 1880s. Both Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) and Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) considered it impossible that Jesus was a Jew – Hegel because of how he understood Jesus' teachings and Fichte because of his ideas about Jesus' character, or *Wesen*. The antisemitic theologian and philosopher Bruno Bauer (1809–82) argued in the 1840s that Jesus was not a Jew but of Hellenistic descent. Ernest Renan (1823–92) had argued in *Leben Jesu* (The Life of Jesus) in 1863 that Jesus, whose racial descent he thought impossible to establish, had been a revolutionary who had fought against the Jews. The orientalist, philologist, and theologian Paul de Lagarde (1827–91) posited that Jesus was in total opposition to, and the contradiction of, everything Jewish; Jesus was not to be considered Jewish but as the Son of God. Lagarde also emphasized the “masculine” Jesus. Then, perhaps most notably in this context, Richard Wagner (1813–83) and his son-in-law Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927) both argued that Jesus was not a Jew.¹⁹

Nonetheless, when the world's first international antisemitic congress was held in Dresden, Germany, in September 1882, Stoecker was one of the attendees. The Vatican's own journal, *Civiltà Cattolica*, reported approvingly that “many violent speeches had been made denouncing the Jews.” Stoecker had presented several resolutions to

¹⁸ Weber, T., *Becoming Hitler . . .*, pp. 174–176.

¹⁹ Fenske, Wolfgang, *Wie Jesus zum “Arier” wurde: Auswirkungen der Entjudaisierung Christi im 19. und zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), pp. 72–73, 81–86, 105–110, 130. Another author who emphasized the masculinity of Jesus and saw him as having a privileged relationship with the white race was Jack London. He built his image of Jesus on his readings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Ernst Haeckel, Herbert Spencer, and Thomas Huxley. London also illustrates well how widespread these ideas were in the early twentieth century. See Bembridge, Steven, “Jesus as a Cultural Weapon in the Work of Jack London,” *Studies in American Naturalism*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2015), pp. 22–40.

the congress that, according to the journal, were “relatively moderate,” all of which had been approved by the other delegates. The Jews were considered a people that could never be assimilated into any national society, and the emancipation of the Jews “had been a ‘fatal mistake’ and new restrictive legislation was urgently needed.”²⁰

1.4 Right-Wing Socialism: Anti-Marxist, Christian, Antisemitic, and Nationalistic

The bourgeois-liberal National Socialism of Naumann and the extreme-right National Socialism of Theodor Fritsch (1852–1933), whose real name was Thomas Frey, sprang from an ethical-conservative tradition that became prominent after German unification in 1871. It was a conservative socialism visible already in the writings of the economist Carl Rodbertus-Jagetzow in the mid-1800s. In 1872, a group of leading Protestant conservative intellectuals had founded the Association for Social Policy (*Verein für Sozialpolitik*). They soon came to be referred to as *Katedersozialisten* (“socialists of the lectern”). While it originally was a derogatory term applied by their opponents, it soon came to a term proudly self-applied by the group. The *Katedersozialisten* were absolutely not left-wingers, and they were not Marxists. They defined themselves by their absolute rejection of Marxist Socialism and laissez-faire liberalism alike. Stoecker became involved with the Association, and in 1877 the Protestant-conservative Central Association for Social Reform (*Centralverein für Sozialreform*) was formed, an organization that also published the journal *Der Staatssozialist* (*The State Socialist*). A year later, Stoecker formed his party, which was characterized by a strong antisemitism. This was a socialism on the right, a socialism not rooted in Marxism, that was not concerned with correcting perceived social injustices through progressive politics and social reforms, but that was instead intended to “preserve an ontologically conceived ethical-holistic social order” in Germany. These were right-wing conservatives who happily self-applied the term “socialist.” National Socialists like Naumann and

²⁰ Kertzer, David I., *The Popes against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), p. 142.

Stoecker passionately opposed not only the materialist (and in their view Jewish) Marxist Socialism, but also liberalism in both its economic and philosophical forms. Materialism constituted nothing less than a direct denial of the existence of God.²¹ Stoecker was mentioned with respect in the Nazi ideologue Rudolf von Sebottendorff's (his real name was Adam Glauer) 1933 book *Bevor Hitler kam* (Before Hitler Came).²² It was therefore a socialism that was completely different both in origin and content from the Marxist Socialism of the left that we normally think of when we hear the term today.

The National Socialism of the NSDAP was also influenced by the wave of right-wing "anti-capitalist" thought that emerged within the *völkisch* movement from the late 1880s and early 1890s. In 1889–1890, older groups of antisemites who opposed both "Jewish Marxism" and "Jewish capitalism" began using the term "German Socialism" (*Deutscher Sozialismus*) in their defense of lower-middle-class and bourgeois interests to get people of the lower and middle classes of the population to join the Antisemitic People's Party (*Antisemitische Volkspartei*), renamed as the German Reform Party in 1893 (*Deutsche Reformpartei*), and the German Social Party (*Deutsch-Soziale Partei*). The term "German Socialism" signified "a moderate, conservative, and middle-class antisemitism, which originated in an anti-Liberal or Christian orthodox standpoint and whose aims were the limitation of the civil rights of Jews as well as economic and social reforms to the benefit of small businesses and small farmers." It combined extreme or ultranationalism and racial antisemitism with a particular form of emotional, rather than rational, anti-capitalism that was *not* a refutation of capitalism as such but only a certain aspect of it, which was claimed to be the Jewish "unproductive" international finance capital. Marxist Socialism was seen as a corruption of true German Socialism, and the German sociologist Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) argued in the pamphlet *Preußentum und Sozialismus* (Prussianism and Socialism) in 1919 that socialism had to be liberated from Marx. It was this Socialism

²¹ Kedar, A., "National Socialism before Nazism . . .," pp. 9–10, 19–21, 28; Fenske, W., *Wie Jesus zum "Arier" wurde . . .*, p. 96.

²² Sebottendorff, Rudolf von, *Bevor Hitler kam: Urkundliches aus der Frühzeit der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung* (Munich: Deukula-Verlag Graffinger & Co., 1933), p. 30.

that DAP party founder and leader Anton Drexler embraced, agitated for, and included in the NSDAP party program of February 24, 1920.²³ In fact, contrary to popular belief, instead of nationalizing key industries the National Socialists started a massive privatization drive once they came into power. They even reprivatized entities that had been nationalized prior to 1933. The Hitler regime pioneered privatization in a time when the governments in the West were nationalizing.²⁴

What all National Socialisms had in common was their understanding of the nation as the central and only relevant social unit. It was the nation that was the object of all economic, political, and social activity, and it was therefore also the nation – which was seen as an organic entity – that was the object of all ethical considerations. What this meant was that all actions were evaluated based on whether they benefited the nation, and *not* the people that made up the nation. The nation was an organism and was not simply the sum of its constituent parts. The nation was simultaneously theologized, and Stoecker argued that every nation (or *Volk*) was “endowed by God with a singular disposition, with special gifts, and that it must hold on to these peculiarities, for they belong to the essence of its existence.” Liberalism, Stoecker argued, had atomized the *Volk*. The individualism entailed in the liberal worldview was rejected completely by the National Socialists. Liberalism had destroyed Germany, it had led to the *Kulturkampf* against the churches and religion, and this individualism was to be replaced by a total subordination of the individual to the will of the nation and by a pious willingness to sacrifice oneself for that nation.²⁵ God and country became one and the same in this view.

The similarities aside, there were certainly also differences between National Socialists like Naumann and Stoecker on the one hand and Hitler and the NSDAP on the other. There were differences between the former two as well, even though they had started out as ideological friends. Stoecker was more focused on nationalism, while

²³ Tyrell, A., *Vom “Trommler” ...*, pp. 19–21.

²⁴ Bel, Germà, “Against the Mainstream: Nazi privatization in 1930s Germany,” *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (2010), pp. 34–55.

²⁵ Kedar, A., “National Socialism before Nazism ...,” pp. 11–13.

Naumann, although still a fervent nationalist, was more focused on the Christian social agenda. Stoecker was more conservative and less concerned with the issue of social reform. Naumann was less hostile toward Social Democracy than Stoecker and instead more negative toward the large landowners. They also differed in that Naumann thought that social reformism would eventually gain traction in the bourgeois political parties, even (or even especially) in the Conservative Party. It was also Stoecker's conservatism that would lead to the break between him and Naumann.²⁶ Hitler could be seen as having combined traits reminiscent of both Naumann's and Stoecker's Christianity-inspired National Socialism. He was certainly very concerned with social reform at the same time as he regarded nationalism to be of central importance. But Hitler was not a conservative, although he was part of an ideological heritage that grew out of conservative circles – he was a revolutionary right-wing ultranationalistic socialist. Conservatives, in Hitler's view, were reactionaries who did not understand what Germany needed to survive – that is, a thorough rebirth of the nation and (equally) thorough moral reform.²⁷

Interestingly, Jung denied that National Socialism was a revolutionary movement and ideology. It was not through violent revolution but through reform that the current private capitalist system should be overturned. Due to its craving for private profits, the current system had become “soulless materialism.” It could therefore never be the “spiritual basis” for true Socialism. This was the opposite of what is commonly thought of as Socialism, which was nothing but “Communism of a Marxist type” in Jung's eyes. Both Communism (which included Social Democracy) and the grubbing finance capitalism were the tools of the Jews to enslave the peoples of the world.²⁸ Jung may of course be

²⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁷ Hitler's anti-Conservatism slant is perhaps best illustrated by his well-known hatred of the monarchy as both a system and a symbol. Hitler's vendetta against the Habsburg family, whom he saw as a symptom of all that was wrong with the multi-ethnic double monarchy in which he was born and grew up, is perhaps the most obvious example of this (Longo, James, *Hitler and the Habsburgs: The Vendetta Against the Austrian Royals* [New York: Diversion Books, 2018]). Hitler scorned the German Hohenzollern family just as much.

²⁸ Jung, R., *Der nationale Sozialismus* . . . , pp. 104–105, 110–111. Jung also discusses the ideas of Marx and Engels in some detail, which was rather uncommon for National Socialist ideologues (ibid., 106–107).

forgiven for not thinking of National Socialism as a revolutionary ideology, because he wrote his book before Mussolini had come to power in Italy in 1922 after the March on Rome. It was only after this point that Hitler realized that this was even a possibility – he was so inspired by Italian Fascism’s revolution that he decided to attempt his own in Munich.²⁹

1.5 Antisemitism: The Key to Understanding the NSDAP Party Program

Issues frequently derogatorily associated with the Jews, such as the prohibition of usury and land rent, and productive versus unproductive capital and labor, are to be found in the NSDAP party program in points 11, 13, and 17–18. Point 11 demanded the abolition of effortless income. Point 13 demanded the expropriation by the state of “trusts” (*not* of companies in general, which is how this has often been interpreted by those who wish to portray National Socialism as a leftist movement), which were understood as nonproductive concentrations of capital where price-fixing was used to defraud the *Volk*. Point 17 demanded land reform “suited to our national needs,” the prohibition on land speculation and land interest, and a law allowing for the expropriation of land that was not used for the benefit of the *Volk*. Point 18 demanded relentless struggle against, and the death penalty for, usurers (*Wucherer*), smugglers, and “lousy criminals against the *Volk*” (*gemeine Volksverbrecher*) “regardless of religion or race.” Indeed, the entire program can only be understood correctly within the Christian, ultranationalist, and antisemitic historical context described above. This connection was made explicitly by Jung in *Der nationale Sozialismus*, in which he claimed that the persecution of the Jews in Germany during the Middle Ages was not due to religious differences but to the Jewish activity of usury through land rent and interest on loans. The trusts were just the

²⁹ Hitler’s admiration for Mussolini and his modeling of his own political movement upon the latter has been the subject of several books. See, e.g., Wiskemann, Elizabeth, *Rome-Berlin Axis: A History of the Relations between Hitler and Mussolini* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949); Schneider, Wolfgang, *Adolf Hitler: Politischer Zaubelerhring Mussolinis* (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2017); Goeschel, Christian, *Mussolini and Hitler: The Forging of the Fascist Alliance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

last developmental stage in modern finance capitalism and an expression of “the mammonism” and “the materialism of our time, whose driving force is none other than the Jewish spirit!”³⁰ The phrase “regardless of religion or race” in point 18 is a testament to that. In fact, this was explicitly stated by Gottfried Feder in a commentary on this point in 1933.³¹ The words “Jew” and “Jewish” get only a single mention, in points 4 and 24, respectively, in the entire program, but it was *precisely because* the rest of the program was almost entirely aimed against the Jews, and understood as such by those whom the NSDAP wished to attract to the then highly exclusive party (remember that this was before it was decided to make it into a popular mass party in order to win election) that the authors of the program here had to make explicitly clear that this applied to everyone and not only the Jews.

Later in his book, Jung described the NSDAP desire for “socialization” (*Vergesellschaftung*) in the following way: “We unreservedly advocate for the transfer of all capitalistic large companies [*Großbetriebe*], which effectively are private monopolies, into the hands of the state, land [a body of *völkisch* self-administration], or local community.” But in contrast to the Marxist position, said Jung, it was a question of “nationalizing,” that is, of “transfer into our people’s hands,” rather than “socialization.” Jung contrasted the National Socialist wish to nationalize only the large private monopolies to the Marxists’ wish to socialize *all* private enterprises regardless of their size or nationalistic character. Furthermore, the only companies and areas affected by this nationalizing were those engaged in mining the “treasures of the earth” (*Bodenschätze*) such as “coal [and] waterpower.” Everything else was not a target for socialization, wrote Jung. This was combined with the demand that no others than German nationals, a category that explicitly excluded the Jews, could be allowed to own land.³²

³⁰ Jung, R., *Der nationale Sozialismus* . . . , pp. 25–28, 40.

³¹ Koehne, Samuel, “The Racial Yardstick: ‘Ethnotheism’ and Official Nazi Views on Religion,” *German Studies Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2014), p. 588. Feder also mentioned point 23, which demanded that newspapers that spread “lies” and “un-Germanness” should be banned. This shows that this point too was aimed against the Jews, even though it did not mention them.

³² Jung, R., *Der nationale Sozialismus* . . . , pp. 133–136, 150.

It is thus obvious that this demand had to do with making sure that the *Volk* had full control over the natural resources on the territory under its possession. This, in turn, was rooted in the ultranationalism that provided the foundation for National Socialist ideology. It was a way for the Nazis to secure the much-coveted autarchy for Germany. Any attempt to understand the party program without interpreting it through the lens of National Socialism's particular brand of antisemitism will lead to grave misunderstandings of the ideology. The term "nationalization" really meant "Aryanization." It was not the state, that is, the government, that was to own and operate these businesses and assets, but Aryan Germans, who were considered members of the German nation. This is also exactly what happened after 1933. The Jews were of course forced to sell. The expropriation was done by government decree, by law, or through violent harassment, and the property was sold – in actuality, handed out – to private non-Jewish Germans at a fraction of its real value. And because of the corrupt nature of the Nazi regime, it was often party officials that "purchased" the best and most valuable goods and properties. It was government-backed robbery on a massive scale.³³

As Drexler started working on the party program of the DAP sometime in 1918, he did so to a large extent based on the ideas of Alfred Brunner of the *Deutschsozialistische Partei* (DSP – German Socialist Party), which had been founded the same year, although he was also inspired by Gottfried Feder and Dietrich Eckart. Many of the points in the DAP program are basically copied from Brunner and the DSP, and there was a considerable overlap in membership between the DSP and the DAP (the DSP was dissolved in 1922, and many of its members instead joined the NSDAP). However, there were also points in the DAP/NSDAP program that did not have direct precursors in the DSP program. Points 4–8 were explicitly directed against the Jews and their civil rights. Points 10–11 were implicitly directed against the Jews too in their focus on the demand that every citizen must be engaged in either intellectual or physical productive work, and on the abolition of workless and effortless income. These types of activities and income were considered typical of

³³ For a great overview of Aryanization, see Friedländer, S., *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Vol. I: . . . , pp. 232–239, 242–244, 247, 257–261, 280–298, 316–330.

the Jews. Point 14, demanding profit sharing in large companies (*Großbetrieben*), referred to large companies and was certainly not demanding profit sharing for the workers in these companies, but rather for the *Volk* – that is, the nation. The DSP program expressly stated that craftsmen, small businesses, and small industries were exempted. The distinction between the productive and unproductive concentration of capital must be kept in mind here. It is the same distinction as the one made in point 16 in the NSDAP program, that is, the demand for the creation and maintenance of a “healthy middle class” by the communalization of “big department stores” (*Groß-Warenhäuser*). This was also a euphemism for Jewish department stores and the leasing of these spaces at low rents to small traders. The latter was certainly not a demand that any Marxist, that is, leftist, Socialist would ever make. But it made perfect sense within an ultranationalist *Weltanschauung* that made the distinction between productive and unproductive companies and individuals, and that was simultaneously informed by a vitriolic antisemitism that in every case put the Jews in the latter category.³⁴

The often somewhat cryptically formulated points in the DAP/NSDAP program are thus often explained by their close relation to the DSP program – the latter was like a hidden matrix on top of which Drexler's program was placed. Gottfried Feder's influence can be seen in point 11, and Dietrich Eckart was obviously the inspiration for point 24 with its demand for religious freedom and for the party to be based on “positive Christianity,” parts of it being taken verbatim from him. That Hitler took part in the formulation of the program appears apparent, according to historian Albrecht Tyrell, although the extent of his involvement remains uncertain. It might be that the short and sharp formulations of the program points are due to Hitler's influence.³⁵

³⁴ Tyrell, A., *Vom “Trommler”* . . . , pp. 76–82; Koehne, Samuel, “Religion in the Early Nazi Milieu: Towards a Greater Understanding of ‘Racist Culture’,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (2018), pp. 670–676, 679–683, 688–690. See also *Grundsätzliches Programm der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiter-Partei*, http://jgsaufgab.de/intranet/geschichte/geschichte/natsoz/programm_nsdaap_20.htm.

³⁵ Tyrell, A., “*Vom Trommler*” . . . , pp. 84–85. Konrad Heiden, who wrote already in the mid-1930s, assigns a much larger role to Hitler in the creation of the program. On the other hand, he mistakenly states that the program was only a matter of propaganda for Hitler, i.e., that he did not really believe in the points listed in it (Heiden, K., *Hitler* . . . [Vol. I], p. 87).

Samuel Koehne has also shown that the NSDAP's two official party program commentaries, one by Alfred Rosenberg from 1923 and one by Gottfried Feder from 1927, confirm that point 24 heavily targeted the Jews and their supposed destructive influence on German morality and the German race. Feder thought "it was obvious that Point 24 was an antisemitic point, as did others who examined the program."³⁶

The ground elements of Hitler's and the NSDAP's National Socialism were therefore more or less all present already in Naumann's and Stoecker's Christian National Socialism of the 1880s and 1890s. However, the main impulse for Hitler's antisemitism did not come from Naumann's religiously motivated arguments, but from arguments based in ideas about biological race and culture in the tradition of Wilhelm Marr, Eugen Dühring, and Theodor Fritsch. Marr, a thorough secularist, was the author of one of the foundational texts of modern antisemitism, namely *Der Sieg des Judentums über das Germanenthum* (The Victory of Judaism over Germanism) from 1879. Marr, who was dubbed "the patriarch of antisemitism" by Moshe Zimmerman in a 1986 book, and who has been credited with coining the phrase itself, claimed that the Jews had disguised themselves and that they had "lodged themselves in Germany as a 'state within a state'," an expression literally used by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, and that their aim was total world domination and the destruction of the German nation. Notably, also, Marr presents the productivist idea about the Jews as a people who shun "real labour." Marr argued that the Jews had by the 1800s almost entirely defeated the Germans, and saw "only one last, desperate 'popular expression' of anti-Jewish struggle: namely, the 'agitation against usury' at a time when 'the poor people [Volk] of all estates [Stände] remain a victim of the [Jewish] usurers and their . . . Germanic helpers'."³⁷

This is a formulation that is basically identical to what we find in point 18 of the NSDAP party program; it is almost as if the authors of the program had Marr's text in mind when they formulated the part

³⁶ Koehne, S., "The Racial Yardstick . . .," p. 588.

³⁷ Kedar, A., "National Socialism before Nazism . . .," pp. 95–99. Quotes and translation by Kedar. For the "a state within the state" quote, see *Hitler, Mein Kampf* . . . (Band I), p. 427 [158]. The editors of the critical volume do not note this similarity with Dühring on this occasion, although they do in other places.

about the death penalty for usurers regardless of their religion or race, that is, whether they were Jewish usurers or their treasonous German helpers. In the chapter “The Career of the Jews” in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler made it clear that the Jew never ever worked in society as a “producer” but as a “moneylender,” always charging “exorbitant interest,” and that the Jew was the inventor of interest as such.³⁸ This was essentially a comment on the party program’s demand for the death penalty against usurers confirming that the reason why it applied to all religions and races was because of the inherent antisemitic content throughout the whole NSDAP program.

1.6 Blending Racial Antisemitism and Christian Productivist Ideology

Another parallel between the National Socialism of Naumann on the one hand and that of Hitler on the other is the focus on “Christian productivism.” This was a view that elevated so-called productive work to a status of a “morally sanctioned organizing principle for society,” one that viewed society as a dichotomy consisting of “producers” and “nonproducers.” The latter were considered “parasites” who lived on the productive work of the former. This view was the centerpiece of the extreme right-wing Theodor Fritsch’s *Weltanschauung* as well. It was, in short, something that was characteristic of modern antisemitism in its entirety. Productivism also became a way for Naumann and Fritsch to reject the ethical conservatism of Stoecker. It was consequently also a main pillar in the National Socialism of Hitler and the NSDAP, and Hitler would write at length about how the Jews were parasites living in the “body” (*Körper*) of other peoples in *Mein Kampf*. Fritsch is of course even more central to this form of National Socialism, since he was not only an ideological inspiration for the Nazis, but also an enthusiastic party member from the 1920s until his death in 1933. Hitler explicitly mentioned the great influence that Fritsch had had on him, especially on his antisemitism.³⁹

³⁸ Hitler, *Mein Kampf* ... (Band I), p. 805 [327].

³⁹ Kedar, A., “National Socialism before Nazism ...,” pp. 29–31, 92–93; Hitler, *Mein Kampf* ... (Band I), pp. 791–793 [322–323].

The National Socialists (i.e., right-wing Socialism) were not against private property per se, not if it was used for “honest work” and did not damage the public interest or the national community, Jung explained. With biblical imagery, he described who qualified as “productive” workers. It was not only “the artist, in whom the divine spark glimmers in his soul, the inventor, the far-sighted entrepreneur, the daring merchant” who fell into this category. So did “also the farmer” and “the forester” who worked the soil and forest to earn a living from Mother Earth “in the sweat from his brow.” The latter is a line taken directly from the tale in the book of Genesis about original sin and the fall from grace leading to humans being banished from the Garden of Eden. Also “the official, who cares about the well-being of the general public” counted as a “productive” worker, Jung explained.⁴⁰ It would of course be rather dim-witted to define matters in such a way that one finds oneself among the unproductive lot.

Fritsch, or Frey, was not a theologian or even a philosopher, but an engineer. However, he founded the publishing house *Hammer Verlag*, which published a lot of antisemitic literature (including the forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*) as well as the *Deutsch-Soziale Partei* (German Social Party – not to be confused with the *Deutschsozialistische Partei* mentioned above) in 1889. He even sat in the *Reichstag* for a short period in 1924. According to Fritsch, Jesus was an Aryan of Galilean descent whose father had been a Roman soldier, and his whole life was a constant battle against the Jews. Fritsch argued that Christianity “was an Aryan protest against the inhumane spirit of the Jews” and that, contrary to Jewish materialism, (true) Christianity was pure idealism. Fritsch argued that Jesus was a genius (*Genie*) character and that, as such, he could, by definition, not be a Jew. The idea of the “creative genius” had an almost mythological status in racist right-wing circles during this time period, and every great historic personality was interpreted in terms of having been such a genius. This included Hitler as well, whose self-image was to a large degree built upon this concept. This meant that the ideologues who followed

⁴⁰ Jung, R., *Der nationale Sozialismus* . . . , pp. 90–91.

Fritsch could simply add some pseudoscientific ornamentation to this argument to make it seem like a solid fact.⁴¹

However, during the mid-1890s Naumann came to abandon his Christian Socialism for a more pronounced National Socialism that replaced the ethical ideal of social reform with a national existentialism that trumped all ethical imperatives, and, simultaneously, his Christian productivism for a nationalist productivism. Naumann's National Socialism now explicitly rejected the idea that private property was to be abolished, yet it took aim at the "abuse of property" and at the immeasurable growth of capital. Here too, it was the concept of productive work that took precedence; capital carried with it interest, and income from interest was not considered productive, since it produced no useful goods. Despite this, Naumann did *not* reject concentration of capital per se, because he explicitly celebrated it when it was combined with great concentration of enterprise, as in the case of big entrepreneurs like Krupp and Stumm. However, when it was the result of "land rent," such as mortgage interest and house rent – and Naumann connected this idea to his antisemitism by explicitly mentioning "Rothschild, Bleichbröder, and company" as examples of interest-accumulating, nonproductive capitalists – then it was anathema. This was nothing other than a form of usury law (*Wuchergesetz* in German), and Naumann claimed that his Christian Social form of "practical anti-capitalism" had been informed by "Conservatives and Antisemites." The prohibition on interest, or income acquired without labor, has a long history in Christianity and was condemned already by Thomas Aquinas, who also threw commercial capital into the same despicable category.⁴² This "practical anti-capitalism" was really nothing other than nationalistic capitalist protectionism.

Fritsch was very influenced by Marr when he claimed that the Jews were the source of all the misery of the German people since "they drain the blood of the national body [*Volkskörper*]." However, Fritsch went beyond even Marr when he declared that the Jews were physically

⁴¹ Fenske, W., *Wie Jesus zum "Arier" wurde ...*, pp. 96–97. For the importance of the concept of "genius" for Hitler, see Pyta, W., *Hitler ...*, pp. 219–260.

⁴² Kedar, A., "National Socialism before Nazism ...," pp. 25, 28–30, 42. Quotations and translation by Kedar.

incapable of bodily labor (the terrible and tragic irony being that the Nazis would enslave the Jews and murder them, to a large extent, through precisely such physical labor in the concentration camp system and, in so doing, prove this assumption wrong in the process, although they no doubt viewed the high death rates among the Jewish slave laborers as a confirmation of Fritsch's idea). They therefore spent their time haggling, trading, and charging exorbitant interest. The Jews possessed a "nomadic nature," claimed Fritsch, and were "cosmopolitan." They were therefore also incapable of nationalist feelings, and consequently a Jew could never be a true German patriot no matter how assimilated he was. In addition, Fritsch was also very much influenced by Eugen Dühring, who claimed that the Jews, whom he accused of being "the most evil manifestation of the entire Semitic race," could not be defined as a religious community but only as a race (this idea was also echoed by Hitler in his letter to Adolf Gemlich on September 16, 1919, the first written evidence we have of Hitler's National Socialist antisemitism, and later in *Mein Kampf*, where he claimed that the Jews were only a race, or a people, and not a religious community, and that they only used religion as a tool to spread as a destructive disease under the guise of religious freedom). Marr had not seen race as being so important and constitutive of the so-called Jewish question as Dühring and, following him, Fritsch did. Dühring introduced the idea that it was racial mixing, not religious intermarriage, that threatened the German people. It was a Manichean worldview characterized by a battle between absolute good and absolute evil, manifested in the flesh as the German and Jewish people, respectively. It is also noteworthy that Dühring, as Hitler later would, also considered established Christianity to be "a spiritual manifestation of the Jewish racial qualities." In Dühring's philosophy, productivism and capital were split up "into healthy ('natural') and pernicious, usurious ('Jewish') forms." Social injustice and class conflict were therefore not structurally embedded in capitalism itself but were the result of seditious Jewish activity.⁴³ Where the views of the anti-Marxist Dühring and Hitler diverged, however, was in

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 97–102. Quotes and translation by Kedar. See also *Hitler, Mein Kampf* . . . (Band I), pp. 427, 795, 799 [158, 324–325]. See also Lüdicke, Lars, *Hitlers Weltanschauung: Von "Mein Kampf" bis zum "Nero-Befehl"* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016), p. 43.

Dürring's rejection of Jesus precisely because he was a Jew.⁴⁴ This was in a sense a more logical attitude than the one adhered to by Hitler.

However, the productivist ideology that Hitler and the NSDAP espoused probably cannot be as separated from the religious, or Christian, world of ideas as, for example, Asaf Kedar assumes. It was no doubt also informed by specifically Christian ideas from the New Testament. Kedar also overemphasizes, it seems, the degree to which Dürring's views really were secular in nature. On the face of it, that was certainly true, as he rejected outright any religious foundations for his antisemitism. But it is at the same time equally true that this racial and so-called biological antisemitism contained the very spiritual and religious concepts that Susannah Heschel has pointed to in her book *The Aryan Jesus*, concepts such as blood and spirit, as well as how blood and spirit interacted with each other.⁴⁵ The metaphysics in Alfred Rosenberg's *Der Mythos des 20 Jahrhunderts* stated "that race is the image of soul." "Soul means race seen from within. And, conversely," he wrote, "race is the external side of a soul."⁴⁶ In this vein, the Berlin pastor Siegfried Nöbling created a creed in 1932 that contained the phrase "We see in the Jews the spiritual and physical poisoning of our race."⁴⁷ These ideas were not secular but thoroughly mythological, spiritual, and even outright religious in character. Even Kedar speaks about Dürring's complex of ideas as being "underpinned by a Manichean cosmology that views good and evil as ontological entities" that existed in the world and acted throughout world history – hardly secular concepts and ideas. He also notes that this dynamic was then *retheologized* by Fritsch, who brought back God and Satan into the discussion about the German and Jewish people. He believed that God had created the Jews to torment humanity just as God had created parasites and vermin to do the same, and that it therefore was human-

⁴⁴ Fenske, W., *Wie Jesus zum "Arier" wurde ...*, p. 87.

⁴⁵ Heschel, Susannah, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 18–23.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Varshizky, Amit, "Alfred Rosenberg: The Nazi *Weltanschauung* as Modern Gnosis," *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2012), p. 320.

⁴⁷ Heschel, S., "Historiography of Antisemitism ...," p. 263.

ity's mission to trample and destroy the Jews. The Jews were, in his words, "the legitimate heirs of Satan."⁴⁸

1.7 The Aryan Warrior Christ: Christian Racial Theology Meets National Socialism

The fact that the early National Socialists like Naumann, Marr, and Fritsch were believing Christians naturally also meant that their concept of who Jesus was had to be influenced by their ideological development. Naumann, for example, argued that Jesus was "on ethical grounds a radical adversary of capital accumulation" and that the "antimammonistic thrust is characteristic of the entire thought of Jesus." He claimed that when the *Volk* would finally wake up from the fog of materialism, whose spell they were currently under, they would find Jesus. It was indeed morally wrong for anyone to "exploit their brothers through interest and compound interest while they have abundantly enough" and to "hoard treasures on earth even though Jesus has forbidden it." The ethical dimension, and the need for ethical reform, was an important part of both Naumann's and Stoecker's National Socialism, yet both came to repudiate the ethical-conservative side of this early National Socialism.⁴⁹ In the book *Jesus als Volksman* from 1894, Naumann claimed that Christ was deeply engraved in the spirit of the German people and argued that he was in fact "German" and a "contemporary" of the German people in Naumann's own time.⁵⁰ These parts of Naumann's conception of Jesus to some extent also appear in Hitler's rendition of Jesus, which is perhaps no surprise considering that Hitler was a huge admirer of the extremely antisemitic mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger, who was also the leader of the Christian Social Party (*Christlich-Soziale Partei*). Hitler would later celebrate Lueger in *Mein Kampf* as perhaps the greatest *German* (although Lueger was of course Austrian) mayor of all time.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Kedar, A., "National Socialism before Nazism . . .," pp. 99, 101.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 27–28, 30 n30. Quotes and translation by Kedar.

⁵⁰ Fenske, W., *Wie Jesus zum "Arier" wurde . . .*, pp. 99–100.

⁵¹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf* . . . (Band I), p. 207 [55]; Hamann, Brigitte, *Hitlers Wien: Lehrjahre eines Diktators* (Munich: Piper, 1996), pp. 333–336, 393–425. For more on Lueger, see Wladika, M., *Hitlers Vätergeneration . . .*, pp. 184–190.

However, Naumann had at least as late as 1891 argued that “racial antisemitism is basically also anti-Christian, and the Christian knows that he cannot conduct a racial struggle on the basis of the Gospel.”⁵² Naumann also still thought by June 1895 that Socialism should not be based on Darwinism “but is to be clarified, purified, and energized by Jesus Christ.” But just a few months later, he shrugged off this view and fully embraced the idea that struggle was “a benign, divinely ordained motor of world history” and that therefore struggle was the key to true progress. He thought it strange that God had created nature on the premise that only he who fights will survive only to then turn around and proclaim that the same principle ought not to apply to humans, human society, and human history. If struggle were to end, Naumann now declared, then world history, culture, and humanity would inevitably come to an end with it. God had blessed struggle, he argued, and stated that Jesus would never demand that Germany destroy its weapons with which it defended its *Volkskörper* and its very existence. It was during the last months of 1895 that Naumann was shedding the last vestiges of his Christian Socialism, turning away from the ethical approach, and instead fully embracing a National Socialism built on the social Darwinist idea of struggle and national existentialism. He also noted that Jesus had *not* told his followers to have no enemies, but instead to love them (this was of course a principle that was not very hard to harmonize with the social Darwinist principle of the struggle for survival – in a way one should be thankful to one’s enemy, because it was after all due to the existence of the enemy that historical progress was possible, according to this view). Ironically, Naumann embraced social Darwinism under direct influence from church historian and fellow Christian Rudolf Sohm. Much like Hitler would later do, Sohm criticized the attempts of some political parties to monopolize Christ and declared that “Christ belongs to no political, indeed to no ecclesiastical party.” It was at the same time a critique that argued for a secular state and the separation of church and state.⁵³

Naumann’s new view of the world as a perpetual racial struggle and, concomitant with this change, his new understanding of Jesus had

⁵² Fenske, W., *Wie Jesus zum “Arier” wurde . . .*, p. 101.

⁵³ Kedar, A., “National Socialism before Nazism . . .,” pp. 39–40.

some even further consequences. By 1902, after a visit to Palestine and having seen the social situation there, Naumann also abandoned the idea of Jesus as a social reformer and believed that one should not ask Jesus for advice when it came to social and economic issues. He also claimed that wherever a state had made Christianity into official religion this was not in the image of Christ.⁵⁴ Whether this change also meant that Naumann began to consider Jesus to have been an Aryan is unknown. Hitler would of course essentially include these very same ideas in chapter 11, “People and Race” (*Volk und Rasse*), of the first volume of *Mein Kampf* in a section under the header “Life Is Struggle” (*Leben ist Kampf*).⁵⁵ This idea formed the backbone of Hitler’s National Socialism, as well as his religious beliefs, during the rest of his life.

It is precisely the “love your enemy” passage (Matthew 5:43–48) that Eckart comments on in his *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin*. In this conversation, it is Eckart who brings the passage up and Hitler that has the role of explaining Jesus’ statement to the readers. Hitler is made to say:

He who is a real enemy, an open one, and therefore much more brutal, him can one also love. One can at least respect him, and that is also what Christ meant. But that we should let into our hearts people who are pure monsters, who could not be stopped from poisoning our body and soul by no amount of love in the world; to suffer that would not even have occurred to Christ in a dream. After all, he does not do so himself. On the contrary, he strikes [back] as hard as he can.⁵⁶

The latter was a reference by Hitler to the often-used story of how Jesus chased the moneylenders out of the temple with his whip in hand.⁵⁷

Hitler would later accuse, for example, the Catholic *Zentrum* party for politicizing religion, and so the Eckart-inspired point 24 in the NSDAP party program, which spoke not only of the party being

⁵⁴ Gärtner, Sandro, *Die Synthese des Nationalen und des Sozialen bei Friedrich Naumann* (Studienarbeit GRIN, 2001), pp. 6–7.

⁵⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf* ... (Band I), p. 755 [306].

⁵⁶ Quoted in Heer, F., *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler* ... , p. 205. My translation.

⁵⁷ See Matthew 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–18; Luke 19:45–46; John 2:15–16.

founded on “positive Christianity” but also of “freedom of religion,” must be understood and interpreted in this light. It could of course be argued that the efforts during the mid-1930s to create a Protestant German state church modeled on the Anglican Church of England contradicts this principle, but the fact that Hitler gave this up when it turned out to be more difficult than he had anticipated suggests that what he had in mind was more a marriage of convenience than of true love. The intention appears to have been to gather all denominations of Protestant Christians under one roof.

But what did the term “positive Christianity” mean? It was, in fact, not a term invented by the National Socialists themselves. It had a longer history within Christianity and “meant[,] according to Protestant terminology of the time, conservative, fundamentalist and nationalistic Protestantism.” But this was not the whole story, because the established meaning did not catch the racial element that was so essential in Nazi religiosity. Antisemitism was the main element in National Socialism as a political ideology, and the same was true regarding the movement’s Christian faith. Alfred Rosenberg described it as “an extreme anti-Jewish Christianity.” The religious freedom that was talked about in point 24 was of course not really a freedom as much as a limitation – it included the caveat that religion was not allowed to offend the law and morality of the *Volk*. Morality was here tied directly to a people’s spirit and race, excluding the Jews by definition. But it could also readily be applied against any Christian dogma that went against National Socialist beliefs and ideology.⁵⁸

Hitler shared his view of the conflicts between the various religious confessions in a speech delivered in Munich on September 27, 1923, when he stated that the NSDAP rested upon “the teaching that *Christ* had once proclaimed to the world, *but what type of Christian each individual is, that is up to each and every one.*” In one’s home, one may be Catholic or Protestant, but as a politician one must first and foremost be a German, Hitler said. He continued: “We want to be respectful to each other in the conviction that we are all Germans, and we are all the more Christian when we do this.”⁵⁹ Four years later, in a speech delivered on

⁵⁸ Koehne, S., “The Racial Yardstick . . .,” pp. 580, 582–583, 587.

⁵⁹ SA, p. 1018 (Document 574).

May 24, 1927, Hitler stated that, when the NSDAP did not tolerate any infighting in the party, “we believe that we are acting in accordance with the intention of our most high Lord. We serve Christ more than those who enter election alliances with Marxists, Atheists, and Jews.” Hitler was referring to the Catholic parties *Zentrum* and BVP, and he continued to berate them for having voted in ways in the *Reichstag* that made them effective allies of the atheist Marxists.⁶⁰

The idea that all confessions should be able to coexist in the NSDAP was also expressed in point 24 of the party program, where it was also said that the party was founded on “positive Christianity” and that it remained stable over time. For example, Goebbels noted in his diary on February 23, 1937, that the party should not go to war with Christianity and that, instead, the NSDAP should declare themselves to be the only true Christians. Hitler had explained that Christ had also fought against Jewish world domination, Goebbels wrote, but the Jew Paul had corrupted Christ’s teachings and had thereby done to Christianity what Marx had done to Socialism. However, this fact could not hinder the NSDAP from being true Socialists.⁶¹ Richard Steigmann-Gall has pointed out that this also implicitly meant that the NSDAP could not allow itself not to be Christians just because Paul had corrupted Jesus’ ideas.⁶² Goebbels ended this paragraph by writing: “The *Führer* is truly a genius. With the power of a prophet, he gives meaning and content to this age. I am euphoric. May God let us keep him many decades still.”⁶³

Goebbels expressed the same wish in his eulogy to Hitler on the latter’s 52nd birthday on April 20, 1943: “We thus ask a merciful God to keep him in good health for a long time still, and to grant His blessing to his work to free our people from all chains.”⁶⁴ The same theme was repeated again in Goebbels’ birthday eulogy the following year, but

⁶⁰ RSA, II/1, pp. 317–319 (Document 129). See also Weikart, R., *Hitler’s Religion . . .*, p. 78.

⁶¹ Goebbels, J., *TBJG*, I/3, p. 55 (February 23, 1937).

⁶² Steigmann-Gall, R., *The Holy Reich . . .*, pp. 118–119.

⁶³ *TBJG*, I/3, p. 55 (February 23, 1937). The particular passage belonged to a part of the manuscript that due to time constraints was not in the actual speech, but it was included in the newspapers’ publication of it afterwards.

⁶⁴ GR II, p. 57 (April 19, 1941). See also *ibid.*, pp. 170, 216 (January 30 and April 19, 1943).

then with added details concerning the God who Goebbels wished should bless Hitler:

One calls the eternal power that rules over us the Almighty, or God, or Providence, or the loving Father, who – as it says in the final chorus of the Ninth Symphony, must dwell above the starry canopy. We ask this Almighty to keep the *Führer* for us, to give him strength and blessings, to heighten and further his work, and to confirm in us our faith, to give us perseverance in our hearts and strength in our soul, to – albeit after struggle and sacrifice – give our people victory and thereby fulfil the age that we have been able to begin!⁶⁵

The symphony that Goebbels was referring to is Beethoven's Ninth, whose final movement, "Ode to Joy," is a celebration of the Christian God. The text was originally a poem written by Friedrich Schiller in 1785, which Beethoven reworked and included in his symphony from 1824. Goebbels even cited the text when he mentioned "the loving Father ... must dwell above the starry canopy," a phrase that in both Schiller's original and in Beethoven's edited version read "above the starry canopy a loving father must dwell."⁶⁶ Goebbels here expressed his religiosity and faith in God, a belief that never left him and that remained with him until the end in Berlin in May 1945.

The imperialist-expansionist trait in Hitler's *Weltanschauung* is also visible in Naumann's National Socialism where nationalism became synonymous with the urge to extend Germany's influence over the world. This was just a natural state of things in a world in which God had ordained struggle to be the highest organizing principle for living organisms. This led Naumann to turn the Malthusian angst over rising populations and a nation's ability to feed its people into a positive drive for expansion. The nation with the largest and healthiest population stood a better chance to win the international struggle between

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 119 (April 19, 1943).

⁶⁶ Goebbels uses the word *guten* about God (or the Father), which is synonymous with the word *lieber* (which also means "dear" or "loved") used by Schiller and Beethoven.

nations. Germany needed higher birth rates and “men, men so we can wage war! The masses are decisive in modern war.”⁶⁷

The idea that Jesus was in fact not at all a Jew but a Galilean Aryan was advanced by Franz Schröngamer-Heimdal in a series of five articles entitled “Was Jesus a Jew?” in *Völkischer Beobachter* already in early 1920, soon after he had joined the party. Schröngamer-Heimdal also considered the Jews to be the literal embodiment of the Antichrist in the form of materialist Judeo-Marxist Bolshevism. Another influential party member that also expressed his admiration for Jesus was Alfred Rosenberg. In his book *Die Spur des Juden im Wandel der Zeiten* (The Track of the Jew through the Ages) from 1920, he argued for a clear separation between the Christ and the Antichrist.⁶⁸ The Aryan warrior Jesus of National Socialism, the antisemitic hero, was also presented in great detail in Hans Hauptmann’s book *Jesus der Arier* (Jesus the Aryan) from 1930.⁶⁹ Hauptmann argued that Jesus was a Galilean and a warrior by nature (*eine Kampfnatur*), but he denied that Jesus was divine. The Jesus that Hauptmann wrote about had not come to establish a new religion but to bring a very old one back to life.⁷⁰ The word *Kampfnatur* had in fact been used about Jesus by Hitler in a speech to an NSDAP rally on December 18, 1926, in Munich.⁷¹

In his book *Der nationale Sozialismus*, Rudolf Jung wrote about Jesus and how he had chased the money changers out of the temple. He also pointed out how Jesus had criticized the Pharisees and quoted the Gospel of John where it said that the Devil was the father of both the Jews and lying and that the Jews were doing their father’s

⁶⁷ Kedar, A., “National Socialism before Nazism . . .,” pp. 51–53. Quotes and translation by Kedar.

⁶⁸ Hastings, D., *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism* . . . , pp. 56–57, 79–80. Others, including Houston Stewart Chamberlain, had expressed similar ideas earlier than that (ibid., p. 206). See also Kellogg, Michael, *The Russian Roots of Nazism: White Émigrés and the Making of National Socialism 1917–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 238–242; Gentile, Emilio, *Contro Cesare: Cristianesimo e totalitarismo nell’epoca dei fascismi* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editori, 2010), pp. 248–258.

⁶⁹ Piper, Ernst, “Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2007), p. 50.

⁷⁰ Hauptmann, Hans, *Jesus der Arier: Ein Heldenleben* (Munich: Deutscher Volksverlag Dr. E. Boepple, 1930), pp. 5–6, 9–10.

⁷¹ RSA, II/1, pp. 105–106 (Document 59). See also Tomberg, F., *Das Christentum* . . . , pp. 125–126.

work. Because Jesus had seen through the Jews and their lies, they had him murdered and crucified. Rather than becoming the Messiah of the Jews, Christ became “the Saviour of the non-Jews.” The Jews have hated Christ with a passion to this day, wrote Jung, because the idealism of Jesus – manifested in the practice of sacrificing one’s own life for the realization of a higher idea and principle – was unintelligible to them. This was what Jesus had done, and this in and by itself constituted proof that he was not a Jew but of Nordic blood. What managed to keep the Aryans in Christianity, a religion that in reality was against the Aryan nature and that they had no real use for, was precisely the heroic death of Jesus Christ: “This act was spirit of our spirit, blood of our blood.”⁷² This portrayed Jesus as a clear inspiration for and leader of the Aryans and the National Socialists, and these are the very same ideas that Hitler expressed as well.

“The masculine character of Jesus” was also addressed by Alfred Rosenberg in his book *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*. It had been in the interest of the Roman Catholic Church to portray Jesus as characterized by “submissive humility” and to proclaim it an ideal in order to draw followers. “To correct this portrayal is yet another indispensable task for the German movement of renewal,” Rosenberg wrote.⁷³ He continued:

Jesus appears to us today as a self-confident Lord in the highest and best sense of the word. It is his life that is of importance for the Germanic people, not his suffering death The violent preacher and the angry one in the temple; the man who carried away, and whom “they all” followed, not the sacrificial lamb of the Jewish prophesy, not the crucified, is the ideal of today, which shines through to us from the Gospels. And if that does not shine through, then the Gospels too are dead.⁷⁴

Rosenberg stressed that the inner recalibration of the Christian believers to Christ the fighter must also necessarily be accompanied by an

⁷² Jung, R., *Der nationale Sozialismus* . . . , pp. 46–47.

⁷³ Rosenberg, Alfred, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung der seelich-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1934), p. 604.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

outward harmonization of expressions. A case in point was the Christian crucifix, which manifested the teaching of Christ as a sacrificial lamb. This was an image that could only contribute to making the German people unwilling to face evil head-on. A German church would have to replace the crucified and defeated Jesus with “the teaching fire spirit, represented by heroes in the highest sense.” He noted that almost all artists in Europe had painted Jesus as an Aryan – blond and thin – and Raphael’s (1513–14) *Sistine Madonna* “showed the blond Jesus ‘downright heroic’ in the world.” This was because “the love of Christ,” Rosenberg wrote, “was the love of a man who was aware of his spiritual nobility and his strong personality.” This was “Jesus as Lord,” according to him: “Jesus sacrificed himself as Lord, not as a slave.”⁷⁵ This made perfect sense within a context where Jesus had been turned into an Aryan with “Nordic” features, something that was the topic of Franz Wolter’s book *Wie sah Christus aus?* (What Did Christ Look Like?) published simultaneously with Rosenberg’s *Der Mythos des 20 Jahrhunderts* in 1930. Consequently, in 1937, at the exhibition of *Entartete Kunst* (degenerate art), the regime displayed images of Christ suffering on the cross as examples of images that were banned. This was because “agony and crucifixion were unheroic and thus unsuitable to the Nazi movement,” writes Susannah Heschel. Focus was to be on Christ’s life and resurrection, not on his death.⁷⁶

Hitler adopted the reinterpreted Jesus that had made him into an Aryan warrior, a glowing example of masculinity who waged holy war on the Jews, who were the offspring of Satan. This demanded some intellectual acrobatics, considering that most of the things that Jesus says and does in the Gospels were not commensurable with National Socialism. But Hitler apparently chose to hold on to the few passages that he felt spoke to him on a more profound level. The advice to turn the other cheek was not among these, however, and this adage was

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 617, 622.

⁷⁶ Heschel, Susannah, “Confronting the Past: Post-1945 German Protestant Theology and the Fate of the Jews,” in Jonathan Frankel and Ezra Mendelsohn (eds.), *The Protestant-Jewish Conundrum: Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. XXIV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 46. “Nordic” was simply just synonymous with “Aryan.” Wolter’s book was discussed at length by the racial anthropologist Hans F. K. Günther in the journal *Volk und Rasse* (People and Race) in 1932 (ibid., p. 65).

therefore assumed to have been forged by the Jew Paul. Instead, as Hitler told his audience in Augsburg on July 6, 1923, the state was to be built upon “true Christianity” and a true Christian did not simply turn the other cheek like a coward, but instead chose to combat injustice and fight for what was right.⁷⁷

Rosenberg proclaimed that scholarly textual criticism had now come far enough for such a renewal of the New Testament to be feasible. Remarkably, Rosenberg too acknowledged the divine nature of Jesus. It was the Gospel of Mark, he wrote, that likely contained “the real core of the message of the child of God against the Semitic doctrine of the servant of God.” The Gospel of John was “the first genial interpretation” of the “experience of the eternal polarity between good and evil against the delusion of the Old Testament” and the Jewish God contained in it. In Mark, where Jesus scolded Peter for calling him the Messiah, there was no trace of “Jesus as the ‘fulfiller’ of the Jewish idea of the Messiah, whom Matthew and Paul brought to us to the calamity of the entire Western culture,” Rosenberg preached. All of this showed, he argued, that “the Pauline churches are thus essentially not Christian, but rather a product of the Jewish-Syrian Apostle activity, such as it was begun by the Jerusalemite [*jerusalemisch*] author of the Gospel of Matthew and, independently of him, completed by Paul.” Rosenberg then cited several paragraphs from the Pauline epistles to demonstrate the Jewish nature of these texts. To infect the nations and peoples with a theocracy, such was “the Pauline forgery of the great figure of Christ.” John, on the other hand, “interpreted Jesus brilliantly, but his realization that he was dealing with an anti-Jewish spirit hostile to the Old Testament had been overgrown by Jewish lore.”⁷⁸ He continued:

The “Christian” churches are but a monstrous conscious and unconscious forgery of the simple, joyful news of the Kingdom of Heaven within us, of the child of God [*Gotteskindschaft*], of the service for good and of the flaming defence against evil. In the original Gospel [*Urevangelium*] of Mark we also find the legendary features of the possessed, which we can trace back to

⁷⁷ SA, p. 947 (Document 544, July 6, 1923).

⁷⁸ Rosenberg, A., *Der Mythos* . . . , pp. 605–607.

popular tales as well as the embellishing additions to the adventures of Friedrich the Great and Francisco the Holy, for example, who is said to have preached even to the birds. But original Mark [*Ur-Markus*] is far away from all the raptures in which parts of the Sermon on the Mount exceed one another. To not oppose evil, to give the left cheek when you are hit on the right and so on, these are feminist exacerbations that are not to be found in Mark. These are forged additions by other people. Jesus' entire being was a fiery "oppositionist." Because of this he had to die. . . . Jesus' religion was undoubtedly the preaching of love. All religiosity is actually primarily a mental excitement that is at least internally related to love. . . . But to develop a German religious movement, which wants to become a Peoples' Church, one must explain that the ideal of loving one's neighbour is subordinated the teaching of nationalism; that no action may be approved by a German Peoples' Church, which does not first and foremost aim at preserving the people.⁷⁹

Rosenberg is here writing as a theologian just as much as a National Socialist ideologue. The Rosenberg that we meet in the pages of *Der Mythos des 20 Jahrhunderts* is thus far from an atheist hell-bent on destroying Christianity. On the contrary, he thought of himself and the NSDAP as the harbingers of real Christianity. I think it is safe to say that the National Socialists took the claim to represent "true" Christianity in the form of Christ's original teachings seriously.

Derek Hastings observes that the people attending the rallies during the early 1920s were reminded again and again of the fact that Jesus had not come to bring peace but a sword. Hitler and the other leading Nazis were constantly portrayed as heroic Christian fighters representing a party that did not ascribe to a "Christianity of words," but to a Christianity of "deeds" or of "action."⁸⁰ The traditional Protestant Christianity of "good works" or "deeds" was a central part of the *Führer* cult in general. The head of the *Ahnenerbe*, the philologist

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 607–608.

⁸⁰ Hastings, D., *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism* . . . , pp. 111–136. For the same, see Sebottendorff, R. von, *Bevor Hitler kam* . . . , p. 26.

and philosopher of religion Walther Wüst, stressed this point in a lecture about the Aryan worldview in *Mein Kampf* in *Hackenbräukeller* in Munich on March 10, 1937.⁸¹ But the roots of this idea of the Aryan Jesus went much further back than this. Thus, it was not as if National Socialism infected Christianity with its foreign racist ideas, but rather the other way around, as Richard Steigmann-Gall has pointed out. These ideas had been developed by Christian theologians for a long time before National Socialism was a historical reality.⁸²

The idea of an Aryan Jesus was in a way a natural theological development of the racist discourse from the mid-1800s onward. It was only a matter of time before this would infiltrate the theological discussions within Christianity. It was not very hard to introduce these ideas either, as Susannah Heschel has shown in her book *The Aryan Jesus*, because of the theological antisemitism that had existed within Christianity for many centuries. Ernest Renan – a French Catholic, linguist, and religion scholar – was the first to give this movement the concepts with which to complete the racial transformation of Jesus from Jew to Aryan. According to Renan, Jesus had been born a Jew, but his racial status had changed when he became the destroyer of Judaism. He had transcended his own Jewishness, Renan argued, and shed his Jewish nature. These ideas were then picked up by Hitler's idol, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, (we will get back to him later) and presented to the world in his *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century) from 1899. Chamberlain wholeheartedly believed in the Aryan Jesus and considered himself to be a true Christian. Furthermore, he argued that only Jesus' teachings which could be made to agree with his Aryan heritage should be kept in the Bible; the rest, which he considered to be Jewish interpolations, would have to be cleansed from Scripture. This view later became

⁸¹ Junginger, Horst, "From Buddha to Adolf Hitler: Walther Wüst and the Aryan Tradition," in Horst Junginger (ed.), *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 121–125.

⁸² Steigmann-Gall, Richard, "Christianity and the Nazi Movement: A Response," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2007), p. 187.

dogma for the pro-Nazi *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians) movement and their theology.⁸³

Many famous Christian theologians were involved in the transformation of Jesus from a Jew into an Aryan. Here, we find professors at well-known theological institutions at prestigious German universities such as Gerhard Kittel and Paul Althaus, William Wrede, Emanuel Hirsch, Walter Grundmann, Wilhelm Bousset, Walter Bauer (a prominent historian of early Christianity), and Paul Fiebig. In 1927, Bauer, in his article “Jesus der Galiläer” (“Jesus the Galilean”), argued that Jesus was an Aryan. Far from a majority of German theologians accepted the *Deutsche Christen* view of course, but enough of them did for it to become an accepted mainstream view that millions of German Christians adhered to, and it was preached to the faithful from the pulpit in tens of thousands of (mostly Protestant) churches in Germany. This included the idea of the nondivine Jesus, that is, the “Son of Man” who was not also at the same time God’s son or the Messiah.⁸⁴ Note that this means that it is not possible to argue that those who did not accept Jesus as divine were by definition not Christians.

The *Deutsche Christen* were not a marginal sect but were the dominant denomination within German Christianity in the mid-1930s, and they controlled most theological faculties, women’s organizations, and, during the war, also managed to infiltrate the organization of military priests. The *Protestant Soldier’s Song Book*, which was distributed in millions of copies to the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*, followed the *Deutsche Christen* in their aim to eradicate all Jewish influences from the Bible and from church music. The organization had its

⁸³ Heschel, S., *The Aryan Jesus . . .*, pp. 30, 33–37, 41–44, 48–55; Gutteridge, Richard, *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb! The German Evangelical Church and the Jews, 1879–1950* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), pp. 22–23; Hitler, *Mein Kampf . . .* (Band I), p. 896 [353]. For more background to the theological development, see also Kelley, Shawn, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2002). The German word for “resurrection” is *Auferstehung*, a word that Hitler did not use, but the implication is still the same, namely that a spiritually dead Germany had become spiritually alive again.

⁸⁴ Ericksen, Robert P., *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Heschel, Susannah, “Jewish Studies in the Third Reich: A Brief Glance at Viktor Christian and Kurt Schubert,” in *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2010), p. 238. See also Kelley, S., *Racializing Jesus . . .*, pp. 64–88, 129–164; Heschel, S., *The Aryan Jesus . . .*, pp. 58–66.

headquarters in Eisenach in Thuringia in central Germany and was led by Siegfried Leffler. The professor of theology at the University of Jena (1936–45), Walter Grundmann, was the head of its research department.⁸⁵ Theology students in Jena were in fact required to read *Mein Kampf*, and the professor of practical theology Wolf Meyer-Erlach told his students that they had to read not only Hitler's epos, but Rosenberg's too, before their examinations.⁸⁶

The idea of an Aryan Jesus had been well established within theological circles in German Protestant Christianity by 1918 at the latest, writes Elisabeth Lorenz. Grundmann, however, never went as far as to explicitly say that Jesus was an Aryan. Instead, he argued, in what can only be described as an intellectual cop-out, that Jesus, as a divine creature, stood above this human category. Jesus was raceless, he claimed, even if he by 1940 in the book *Jesus der Galiläer und das Judentum* (Jesus the Galilean and Judaism/the Jews), note the title's similarity to Bauer's article from 1927, wrote with the utmost certainty that Jesus was not a Jew. But Grundmann's view of Jesus was based on arguments coming from theology and the history of religion, not from race biology.⁸⁷ In fact, the study of Judaism did not diminish during National Socialist rule. Instead, it flourished, albeit in its ideological and antisemitic form, and produced thirty-two dissertations in the years 1939–42 alone.⁸⁸ Grundmann's book was a huge success that sold 200,000 copies in the first six months.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Bergen, Doris L., *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 1–8, 98–100, 148–149; Heschel, S., *The Aryan Jesus* . . . , pp. 3–6, 26–66, 88–91; Lorenz, Elisabeth, *Ein Jesusbild im Horizont des Nationalsozialismus: Studien zum Neuen Testament des "Instituts zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben"* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), pp. 29–34.

⁸⁶ Heschel, Susannah, "Being Adolf Hitler: Mein Kampf as Anti-Semitic Bildungsroman," in John J. Muchalzyk et al. (eds.), *Hitler's Mein Kampf and the Holocaust: A Prelude to Genocide* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), p. 189.

⁸⁷ Lorenz, E., *Ein Jesusbild im Horizont des Nationalsozialismus* . . . , pp. 35–37. For a detailed history of Grundmann and his role in Aryanizing Jesus, see Deines, Roland, "Jesus der Galiläer: Traditionsgeschichte und Genese eines antisemitischen Konstrukts bei Walter Grundmann," in Roland Deines, Volker Leppin, and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr (eds.), *Walter Grundmann: Ein Neutestamentler in Dritten Reich* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), pp. 43–131.

⁸⁸ Heschel, S., "Jewish Studies in the Third Reich . . . ," pp. 240–241.

⁸⁹ Head, Peter, "The Nazi Quest for an Aryan Jesus," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2004), pp. 79–80.

Conservatism in Germany, not least in its northeastern parts such as Prussia, was closely tied to the churches, and Shelley Baranowski underlines that it is not possible to understand this conservatism unless one investigates the role of the Evangelical churches in society.⁹⁰ What the *Deutsche Christen* tried to do was not really at all new, and it was not at all alien to Christianity. In fact, it was essentially the same as what the early church father Marcion of Sinope (circa 85 BCE–circa 160 BCE) tried to do. He has been credited with creating the first Christian canon, which consisted of eleven “books.” Only one of the Gospels in the New Testament, namely that which later was ascribed to Luke (although absent the history of Jesus’ birth and all references to the Old Testament), was part of that canon, and all the rest were texts ascribed to Paul. Marcion, who has been classified as a Gnostic, thought that the Old Testament was in complete contradiction to the message of Jesus. Not only was the Old Testament filled with internal contradictions, but it was also deeply immoral and barbaric. The Jewish God in the Old Testament was simply not the same God as that which Jesus had spoken about, according to him, but the Demiurge. Marcion’s project was not successful, however, and he came to be seen by Catholic orthodoxy as one of the first heretics. Yet, his gift to church history was his contribution to the creation of the canon that is still accepted today.⁹¹ The *Deutsche Christen* thus in a sense wanted to return to Marcion’s opposition to the Old Testament influences in the Christian canon.

This was the same view as that which Houston Stewart Chamberlain espoused in his *Mensch und Gott* (Human and God) from 1922. There, he hailed Marcion as a Gnostic role model because he had proclaimed that the materialist Jewish God Jahveh was not the father of Jesus. The Jewish God was the evil creator God, the Demiurge, who ruled over the material world. The Aryan God, whose son was Jesus, was the God of love. The Jewish Jahveh was the one who saw to it that the Jews killed Christ. Marcion then devoted his life to liberating

⁹⁰ Baranowski, Shelley, *The Sanctity of Rural Life: Nobility, Protestantism, and Nazism in Weimar Prussia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 83.

⁹¹ Freeman, Charles, *A New History of Early Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 134–136.

Christianity from the Old Testament, he proclaimed. It was in essence a Manichean Christianity where the God of evil stood against the God of goodness. Jewish Christianity was a religion of laws and a “religion of sin”; true Aryan Christians were in no need of churches or even religious dogmas. All that Aryans needed to encounter God were Wagner’s works of art.⁹²

The theology and cosmology expressed here, where a God who created the material world (the Demiurge) stands in total contrast to a transcendental God, is indeed, as Amit Varshizky points out, a Gnostic concept. Alfred Rosenberg also held up Marcion as a religious pioneer, and he may have picked this view up from Adolf von Harnack, who published a book entitled *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (Marcion: A Gospel from the Foreign God) in 1920.⁹³ We do not know when, or even if, Hitler read Chamberlain’s book, but his views overlap frequently with those of Chamberlain’s also in this case. This was a view of the relationship between man and God that suited Hitler perfectly, considering that he had long since used Wagner’s operas, as well as other pieces of art, to gain access to transcendent, religious-like experiences.

It is in this context that one has to understand the massive violence inflicted upon the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh (תנ"ך) – that is, the scrolls containing the Torah (תורה), Nevi'im (נביאים), and Ketuvim (כתובים) – by the Nazis during the Pogrom of November 9–10, 1938. Thousands of copies of these books were burned in hundreds of German cities, large and small, and 1,400 synagogues were set ablaze in a frenzy of antisemitic hatred. Alon Confino points out that these burnings are often forgotten when the history of the November Pogrom is written. He asks why the Nazis would go to such lengths and expend so much energy on burning religious items.⁹⁴ Part of the answer may be the desire to purge a National Socialist Christian Germany of what was considered Jewish contamination of the Christian Bible.

⁹² Hesemann, Michael, *Hitlers Religion: Die fatale Heilslehre des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Pattloch Verlag, 2004), pp. 200–201.

⁹³ Varshizky, A., “Alfred Rosenberg . . .,” pp. 316, 323–324.

⁹⁴ Confino, Alon, “Why Did the Nazis Burn the Hebrew Bible? Nazi Germany, Representations of the Past, and the Holocaust,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (2012), pp. 369–370.

Rosenberg celebrated Chamberlain's book in *Der Mythos des 20 Jahrhunderts*, where he stressed that the National Socialist fight for a renewal of German religious life was "the search for an immediate path to the personality of Christ." He continued by stating that the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder "demanded once, that the religion towards Jesus [*Religion an Jesum*] should become the religion of Jesus [*Religion Jesu*]. This is precisely what Chamberlain intended. A completely free man, who inwardly dominates the overall culture of our time, who has shown the finest feeling for the great superhuman simplicity of Christ and portrayed Jesus as he once appeared: as the mediator between man and God" [emphasis in original].⁹⁵ This undeniably sounds like a clear recognition of Jesus' divinity on Rosenberg's part. He thus continued his celebration of Jesus from *Die Spur des Juden im Wandel der Zeiten* from 1920.

The same idea was expressed by Jung in *Der nationale Sozialismus*, where he stated that it would be a mistake, as some *völkisch* groups had done, to reject the original Christianity of Jesus just because church Christianity had been corrupted by Jewish influences and teachings. What the National Socialists were striving for could be summarized in the term "people's church" (*Volkskirche*), Jung wrote. This, however, did not imply an actual centralized church organization, nor did it mean that Christianity should be replaced by a revived "Wotan faith." Here, Jung made an argument that Hitler would make later on, and he did so again when he stated that Luther's reformation of the church was only half successful since he did not free the church from its "centralist" (i.e., Jewish) trait. The National Socialist "people's church" would be a nonconfessional amalgamation of the Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany. This would free them from international "centralism" and make them truly nationalistic and German. A prerequisite for the formation of a free "People's Church" was "the separation of church and state," wrote Jung. It was simply not possible for any German religious community to be free if it was associated with the state, he argued, and he exemplified this by referring to the situation in his native Sudetenland.⁹⁶ It is obvious that Jung did not yet envision the National Socialist takeover of power in Germany, since Hitler actually made an

⁹⁵ Rosenberg, A., *Der Mythos* . . . , pp. 623–624.

⁹⁶ Jung, R., *Der nationale Sozialismus* . . . , pp. 88–90.

effort to do the exact opposite, that is, to create a state church as in England. Jung argued within an assumed context where the National Socialists would be living under a non-National Socialist government, as was the case in Weimar Germany when he wrote his book.

Alfred Rosenberg also wrote about how a German *Volkskirche* “was the longing of millions” of Germans. Rosenberg claimed that science could defeat the Christian churches’ faulty dogmas but that it could never destroy “true religion.” The People’s Church would gather all believers in God regardless of confession if their faith remained loyal to the nation and did not contradict “national honour.” Religion was a personal matter that was up to everyone to decide for themselves – in contradiction to the current churchly dogmas of Christianity. Dogmas in religion were a Jewish creation and ought to be shunned. The Old Testament had to be cast aside. It represented the failed effort of the last 1,500 years to make the Germans into Jews in spirit. It was an attempt that was intimately tied to the “horrible material domination of the Jews,” Rosenberg stated. Another important effort was to revise the New Testament and free it from “superstitious stories” (*abergläubische Berichte*). Rosenberg then stated that “the necessary fifth Gospel” would not be decided upon by a synodic meeting, but “will be the creation of a man who experiences the longing for purification just as deeply as he has researched the scholarship on the New Testament.”⁹⁷

Every member of the *Deutsche Christen* was of course a more or less rabid antisemite. Leffler, the leader of this group, stated to a conference in 1936 that he knew that he had a moral obligation to kill Jews, even though this appeared to contradict the prohibition on murder in Christianity, since it was a defensive act intended to save the German nation from its destruction. Leffler said:

Even if I know “thou shalt not kill” is a commandment of God or “thou shalt love the Jew” because he too is a child of the eternal Father, I am able to know as well that I have to kill him, I have to shoot him, and I can only do that if I am permitted to say: “Christ.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Rosenberg, A., *Der Mythos* . . . , pp. 599–604.

⁹⁸ Heschel, S., “Historiography of Antisemitism . . . ,” pp. 258–259.

No one at the conference seems to have had anything to say against Leffler's statement – even though this was before the Nazis themselves arrived at this conclusion. On April 4, 1939, the *Deutsche Christen* founded a research and propaganda center with the cumbersome name The Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence in German Church Life (*Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben*). The Institute was extremely successful and active, and arranged many conferences and publicized its own “research” in the form of books and articles. The *Deutsche Christen* had about 600,000 pastors, bishops, theology professors, and religion teachers as members by the middle of the 1930s, and eventually came to attract between a quarter and a third of all the members of the Protestant churches in Germany. It was therefore a true mass movement. The opposing *Bekennende Kirche* never managed to gather more than about 20 percent of the Protestant pastors and remained a minority group during the short but horrible history of the Third Reich.⁹⁹ Ernst Klee has described the close collaboration between the Evangelical clergy and the Nazi regime in his book “*Die SA Jesu Christi*.” He shows that National Socialism took over Evangelical Christianity to such a degree that the *Landesverein für Innere Mission* (Country Association for the Inner Mission) in Hamburg took over, and then ran, the concentration camp Kühlen from the SA in July 1933. Many other clergy personnel served as guards in other concentration camps, for example, in Hannover and in Esterwegen (until 1936 the largest concentration camp after Dachau), and many were also SA members. No wonder Klee talks about these clerics as the SA and SS of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁰

Susannah Heschel writes in *The Aryan Jesus* that if Hitler's antisemitism got a good and wide reception in Germany then this was because of the echo chamber created by the relentless anti-Jewish theological discourse that dominated the country, which linked Nazi antisemitism and Christianity's antisemitism with the churches' moral authority. Antisemitism also tied together the two fighting factions

⁹⁹ Bergen, D. L., *Twisted Cross*: . . . , p. 7; Heschel, S., *The Aryan Jesus* . . . , pp. 3–4, 10–17, 101–104.

¹⁰⁰ Klee, E., “*Die SA Jesu Christi*” . . . , pp. 61–74.

within the Protestant church, that is, the *Deutsche Christen* and the *Bekennende Kirche*. Anti-Judaism was, Heschel writes, the most frequent theme within Christianity, just as antisemitism was the most frequent theme within National Socialism. Nazism could not completely reject Christianity, not least because of the long history of antisemitism within this religion; but it did combat the churches' influence in the political and moral arenas. Siegfried Hermle notes that not one single Protestant bishop, church directorate, or synod protested the boycott against German Jews and their businesses in 1933, and that this can be explained by reference to both theology and political pragmatism. They kept silent about the Jews, writes Hermle, but on the other hand explicitly voiced their support for the regime in their communication with foreign churches, minimizing the abuse and discrimination that the Jews were exposed to, when their foreign counterparts wondered what was going on in Germany. But while Nazism battled the churches, Heschel notes, Nazism also played on Christian ideas and tradition in its own propaganda to get more Germans to join the NSDAP and the National Socialist project. On the other hand, the *Deutsche Christen* played on the National Socialist *Weltanschauung* to make themselves more attractive in the eyes of the regime. Both the *Deutsche Christen* and the NSDAP viewed Hitler as a reincarnation of the Messiah, writes Heschel. The antisemitism of the *Deutsche Christen* aimed to actively support and to lend moral authority to the Nazi regime's oppression of the Jewish people, and even if the regime's goals did not always align with those of the *Deutsche Christen*, the support of the latter was nonetheless important for Hitler.¹⁰¹

However, there apparently were limits to how far the regime wished to go when returning the love for National Socialism that the *Deutsche Christen* and the Institute exhibited. Peter Head cites Martin Bormann, who made it clear to Grundmann in September 1942 that the regime was not prepared to lend official recognition to the Institute. Grundmann's efforts were "well meant," Bormann wrote, but there was

¹⁰¹ Heschel, S., *The Aryan Jesus* . . . , pp. 6–9; Hermle, Siegfried, "Die antijüdische NS-Politik als Herausforderung des Protestantismus," in Thomas Brechenmacher and Harry Oelke (eds.), *Die Kirchen und die Verbrechen im nationalsozialistischen Staat* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), pp. 177–178.

no official interest on the part of the government to either assimilate Christianity into National Socialism or in proving that a reformed Christianity was free of Jewish influences. This likely did not come as a surprise to Grundmann, who already in March 1941 concluded at a conference organized by the Institute that the German *Volk*, which was involved in “a struggle against the satanic powers of world Judaism for the order and life of this world, dismisses Jesus, because it cannot struggle against the Jews and open its heart to the king of the Jews.”¹⁰²

Head’s quotation of Grundmann ends there. This makes it appear as if Grundmann equated the regime’s unwillingness to endorse the Institute with a rejection of Jesus. But Susannah Heschel, who also cites Grundmann’s statement, shows that he then went on to argue that there was no need to worry because the “struggle against the satanic Jews can be carried forth without having to abandon Jesus” because Jesus was indeed *not* the king of the Jews. The Jews have persecuted Jesus and everyone who follows him to this very day, Grundmann wrote, but the Aryan people could put their faith in Jesus Christ to save them.¹⁰³ This makes one wonder whether Head does not include this last part because he wants to make it appear as though Hitler’s Germany rejected Jesus and Christianity. This suspicion is especially warranted because Head, a New Testament scholar and a Christian, has defended both Grundmann and Christianity in a critical review of Heschel’s book *The Aryan Jesus*.¹⁰⁴

Considering this issue, it also becomes clear why Head uses Rauschnig uncritically in his own article from 2004 about the Aryan Christ – it panders to his own sentiments about the issue and confirms his prejudiced view that Hitler and the Nazis rejected both Christianity and the Jesus figure. But Bormann’s statements are still significant. There were other such displays of the government’s wish for the churches in Germany to remain aloof from the state too. For example, in 1936 the NSDAP demanded that the churches should remove the

¹⁰² Head, P., “The Nazi Quest . . .,” p. 78. The term “king of the Jews” was an odd one to use for someone like Grundmann, who argued that Jesus was not a Jew (see *ibid.*, p. 85).

¹⁰³ Heschel, Susannah, “Reading Jesus as a Nazi,” in Tod Linafelt (ed.), *A Shadow of Glory: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ Head, Peter, “Susannah Heschel’s *The Aryan Jesus*: A Response,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2010), pp. 421–430.

swastikas from their altars and newspapers. This caused loud protests from pastors and church leaders who “claimed that the swastika was a key element in the religious life of their congregants.”¹⁰⁵ Bormann’s letter and the example from 1936, however, are probably among the best evidence we have that Hitler, and the other leading Nazis, were not using Christian ideas simply for propaganda purposes. One could argue that the regime acted in this way because it did not want to be associated with Christianity or the churches – whether Catholic or Protestant. But one could also argue that this was an instance of the Nazi leadership taking point 24 of the NSDAP program seriously, that is, that no denomination should be officially favored over another. The latter interpretation is supported for instance by Gerhard Besier, who concludes that “among the National Socialist, or Nazi, political leadership, there was a broad spectrum of opinion with regard to the traditional churches. In reality, the Nazi Party ... never really pursued an official propaganda policy of encouraging people to leave the church. Instead, they constantly aligned themselves with Article 24 of the party program.”¹⁰⁶

That Christian anti-Judaism really can be a breeding ground for racial antisemitism, so-called *praeparatio antisemitica*, has been established by several scholars.¹⁰⁷ This is supported also by Doris L. Bergen in her book *Twisted Cross*. Bergen, like James M. Rhodes, Robert A. Pois, and Richard L. Rubenstein, points to the central place of Christianity in National Socialist Germany, and cites Rubenstein, who writes that the culture that made the death camps possible was not only endemic to the West but was a result (albeit an unintended one) of the fundamental religious traditions in the West. Christianity’s hostility toward Jews and Judaism played a necessary, if not a sufficient, role

¹⁰⁵ Ericksen, Robert P. and Heschel, Susannah, “The German Churches and the Holocaust,” in Dan Stone (ed.), *Historiography of the Holocaust* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 298.

¹⁰⁶ Besier, Gerhard, “The Churches and National Socialism between Hitler’s Religious Equivocation and Rosenberg’s Myth: Ambiguities, Fascination and Self-Assertion,” in Martin Nykvist, David Gudmundsson, and Alexander Maurits (eds.), *Classics in Northern European Church History over 500 Years: Essays in Honour of Anders Jarlert* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), p. 153.

¹⁰⁷ See, e.g., Gerdmar, Anders, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 594.

in National Socialism's ability to turn a whole nation (a slight exaggeration, of course, considering that there were a lot of Germans who were prepared to risk their lives to help the Jews) against the Jews. Bergen stresses how Christian influences and imagery flooded Nazi Germany through Nazi propaganda campaigns. For example, the iconography that the regime used to its benefit was full of references to "self-sacrifice" and "redemption." As was the case in Croatia during the same period, Christianity's history in Nazi Germany shows that religious, national, and personal identities reinforce each other in a (sometimes) deadly way, according to Bergen.¹⁰⁸

Far from everyone in Germany shared the view of Jesus as an Aryan, of course. Victor Klemperer tells of a legend that made its way through Germany during 1938: a man comes to the hospital in Berlin to have his and his wife's baby delivered. Over the hospital bed, there is an image of the infant Jesus. The man tells the nurse that the image must be taken down because his newborn baby should not have to see a Jewish baby as it opens its eyes for the first time. The nurse tells him that she cannot do anything about this, but she promises to bring his views to those in charge. The man goes away. In the evening, the doctor sends him a telegram telling him: "You have gotten a son. The image does not have to be removed, however, because the child is blind."¹⁰⁹ Dark humor as criticism of dictatorial oppression was not unique to Nazi Germany. We find the same in Stalin's USSR and every other brutal dictatorship.

Although more and more scholars now argue that National Socialism was a thoroughly spiritual and religious movement, there are still many who do not ascribe to this view and instead believe that Nazism was based on secular ideas about race. For the Nazi ideologues, however, religion was intimately tied to the concept of race. The Aryan's idealism was considered to be the most conducive to religious feeling, and this was contrasted with the Jewish materialist inability to

¹⁰⁸ Bergen, D. L., *Twisted Cross* . . . , pp. 8–10. For similar arguments, see also Rhodes, James M., *The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980); Pois, Robert A., *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986); Rubenstein, Richard L., *The Cunning of History: Mass Death and the American Future* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁹ Klemperer, Victor, *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten: Tagebücher 1933–1941*. Herausgegeben von Walter Nowojski unter Mitarbeit von Hadwig Klemperer (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1995). Entry for March 30, 1938.

house any real religious belief. The Jew wore religion as a cloak, while the Aryan lived and breathed it. The Aryan possessed a “racial soul,” and the important thing for National Socialists was not a specific theology, religious dogma, or tradition. Rather, it should be something that changes with the times but always remains true to the Nordic Germanic spirit. “Blood and faith” were closely tied together. Whatever the particularities of the specific religious beliefs held by the Nazis, they had to agree with their ultra-antisemitic and racist ideology.¹¹⁰ According to the theologian Hugo Delff (1840–98), it was precisely the idealism of Jesus that had brought him into such sharp conflict with the materialistic Jews. The Germans, on the other hand, were characterized by the same pure idealism as Jesus and could therefore intuitively understand his teachings.¹¹¹

Obviously, the move to de-Judaize Jesus was to a large degree motivated by ideological and racist concerns about him being Jewish; this was a change that occurred within a specific historical context in the German-speaking countries beginning in the early 1800s. Philosophers such as Hegel and Fichte began to question Jesus’ Jewish origins. More important for Hitler, however, was perhaps that his idol Richard Wagner, the composer, thought that Jesus was not a Jew but an Aryan. However, the first author to include the idea of Jesus as an Aryan in the title of a book was Max Sebald (1859–?), who published *Jesus der Arier und die jesuanische Weltanschauung* (Jesus the Aryan and the Jesus Worldview) in 1886/87, in which he, among other things, claimed that the authors of the Gospels had, because they were “Orientals,” not understood Christ’s teachings. Sebald even denied Jesus’ divinity and claimed that Joseph, whom he said had been an Aryan too, was Jesus’ real father.¹¹² It would therefore be too simplistic and instrumentalist to assume that Hitler’s religious beliefs – including his views on Jesus – were motivated simply by his racism. Such a view cannot explain why the antisemites considered Jesus a person worth salvaging from the wreckage of Christianity in the first place. There also

¹¹⁰ Varshizky, Amit, “The Metaphysics of Race: Revisiting Nazism and Religion,” *Central European History*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2019), pp. 256–257, 259, 276–283.

¹¹¹ Fenske, W., *Wie Jesus zum “Arier” wurde . . .*, p. 101.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 9–12, 83–85, 92–94. Fenske’s book shows just how many thinkers spread this idea.

appears to have been a deep and sincere religious belief behind this effort. The reason behind this yearning for an Aryan Jesus is very likely to be found in genuine religious convictions on Hitler's part too.

1.8 Hitler's Understanding of Jesus

The first time the available sources record Hitler speaking about Jesus is on August 31, 1920, when he gave the speech "Why Are We Antisemites?" (for the second time) to an NSDAP crowd in Rosenheim.¹¹³ Hitler then apparently mentioned Jesus again in a speech called "Party Politics and the Jewish Question" delivered on December 8, 1920. The transcription of the speech in the *Völkischer Beobachter* did not mention Jesus, but in the notes to this speech we actually do find a reference to "Christ," and thus it is reasonable to assume that Hitler did indeed mention him.¹¹⁴ Then, on April 21, 1921, Hitler again spoke at an NSDAP meeting in Rosenheim, where he, according to the *Völkischer Beobachter*, said that all those who did not wish to see Christianity, which today was unfortunately only a token Christianity, be destroyed had to resist the Jews, who had the ambition to rob the Germans of their Christian faith. "I cannot imagine Christ as anything but blond and with blue eyes," Hitler said, and "the Devil, on the other hand, only with the Jewish snout."¹¹⁵ This was the first time on record that Hitler talked about Jesus as an Aryan.

As we have seen, this was not something that Hitler had dreamed up himself; it was the product of a development within Christian theology from the mid-1800s onward in the works of Ernst Renan, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and Paul de Lagarde.¹¹⁶ We know that Hitler was aware of Lagarde, because Alfred Rosenberg records a conversation with Hitler in his diary on December 13, 1941, that mentions

¹¹³ SA, pp. 220–221 (Document 140); Weikart, R., *Hitler's Religion* . . . , p. 81. Note that the *Völkischer Beobachter* (not yet an NSDAP newspaper) included a shorter summary that does not include these phrases.

¹¹⁴ SA, pp. 276–277 (Documents 172 and 173). Again, the *Völkischer Beobachter* was not yet an NSDAP newspaper. The takeover was announced on December 18, 1920.

¹¹⁵ SA, p. 367 (Document 223).

¹¹⁶ Heschel, S., *The Aryan Jesus* . . . , pp. 30, 33–37, 41–44, 48–55; Fenske, W., *Wie Jesus zum "Arier" wurde* . . . , pp. 9–88. See also Lorenz, E., *Ein Jesusbild im Horizont des Nationalsozialismus* . . .

Lagarde.¹¹⁷ As we have seen, several famous and influential German theologians also adhered to this idea.¹¹⁸ The oppositional Nazi Otto Straßer, too, mentions Lagarde (next to Chamberlain) in his memoir *Hitler und ich* (Hitler and I) and states that it was Eckart who introduced both thinkers to Hitler.¹¹⁹ Note that none of this should be interpreted as evidence that Hitler read Lagarde in the early 1920s, although he may have. Timothy Ryback has found a well-read 1934 edition of an anthology of Lagarde's antisemitic and nationalist writings, originally published in late 1800s, called *German Essays* that contains almost 100 pages of Hitler's marginal notes.¹²⁰ This suggests that Hitler had not read these particular texts before. Hitler therefore most likely initially got his knowledge of Lagarde not from Lagarde directly but from other sources, such as Eckart, whom he celebrated at the end of the second volume of *Mein Kampf*.¹²¹ This would certainly explain how Eckart could be so on point regarding Hitler's views on this topic in his book *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin* from 1924.¹²²

The Aryan Jesus was a theme that would be raised by Hitler from time to time over the following years. Goebbels recorded a conversation with Hitler in his diary on February 23, 1937, where Hitler said that Christ too had fought against Jewish world domination and for this the Jews had nailed him to the cross and killed him, making it evident that he did not consider Jesus to have been a Jew. Paul (the apostle) had then corrupted the content of Christ's teachings and had thus done to Christianity what Marx had done to Socialism. This fact, however, could not be allowed to stop the NSDAP from being Socialist,

¹¹⁷ Rosenberg, A., *Alfred Rosenberg ...*, pp. 415–416. The table talks record this part of the conversation too, but this version is worded differently and is much less clearly formulated; see Jochmann, W., *Monologe*, pp. 150–151.

¹¹⁸ Ericksen, R. P., *Theologians under Hitler ...*, passim; Heschel, S., *The Aryan Jesus ...*, pp. 3–6, 26–66, 88–91; Bergen, D. L., *Twisted Cross ...*, pp. 1–8, 98–100, 148–149; Chappel, James, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 99.

¹¹⁹ For this, see Ryback, Timothy W., *Hitler's Private Library: The Books That Shaped His Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), p. 69.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134. ¹²¹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf ...* (Band II), p. 1739 [353].

¹²² Eckart, D., *Der Bolschewismus ...*, pp. 18–29. For a critical analysis of Eckart's work, see Plewnia, Margarete, *Auf dem Weg zu Hitler: Der "völkische" Publizist Dietrich Eckart* (Bremen: Schünemann Universitätsverlag, 1970).

Hitler said.¹²³ Richard Steigmann-Gall points out that Hitler here also implies that Paul's corruption of Jesus' teachings should not be allowed to stop the NSDAP from being Christian.¹²⁴ The founder of the *Thule Gesellschaft*, the abovementioned Rudolf von Sebottendorff (1875–1945), really Adam Alfred Rudolf Glauer, celebrated the *völkisch* ideologue Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874–1954) as one of the forerunners of National Socialism and noted with approval that Liebenfels had “tried to restore the original text of the New Testament from the books of the church fathers; his books were confiscated and destroyed.”¹²⁵

In his memoirs, the former governor-general of the General Government of Occupied Poland, Hans Frank, relates an episode that is said to have happened when Hitler visited Mussolini in Rome in May 1938 (his only visit to the Italian capital). At one point during this visit, Hitler apparently remained standing in front of a very old bust of Jesus (according to Frank, it was the oldest such bust in existence and thought to date back to the second century) and contemplated this work of art. With admiration in his voice, Hitler stated, Frank claims, that this bust could very well have been made by an artist who had had the opportunity to inquire about Jesus' appearance from people who had met him. According to Frank, Mussolini agreed with this view and Hitler then allegedly said that it was the best evidence available for the view that Jesus was not a Jew.¹²⁶ This moment thus appears to have had a profound effect, perhaps even a religious one, on Hitler. But can we be sure that Hitler really meant what he said in this instance? No, we cannot. Can we even be certain that this happened and that it is not just a figment of Frank's imagination? The honest answer is that we cannot. The reason is that Frank is not always a reliable witness. However, even if Frank made it all up it still signifies something important, namely the

¹²³ *TBJG*, I/3, p. 55 (February 23, 1937).

¹²⁴ Steigmann-Gall, R., *The Holy Reich* . . . , pp. 118–119.

¹²⁵ Sebottendorff, R. von, *Bevor Hitler kam* . . . , p. 32.

¹²⁶ Frank, Hans, *Im Angesicht des Galgens: Deutung Hitlers und seiner Zeit auf Grund eigener Erlebnisse und Erkenntnisse* (Munich: Friedrich Alfred Beck Verlag, 1953), p. 294. See also Heer, F., *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler* . . . , p. 343. It is unknown what bust this was because there is no bust portraying Jesus dating to anywhere near the second century in existence. The story may be apocryphal, but it is nonetheless significant since it tells us a lot about how Frank viewed Hitler and his admiration for Jesus.

fact that he obviously did not think that his readers would regard this story as false. The matter-of-fact nature of the story itself as it appears in Frank's memoirs should at least tell us that Hitler's admiration for Jesus was well known within National Socialist circles.

Naturally, Hitler's antisemitism informed his view of Jesus, but the religious aspect must be considered more important here because it is only the religious significance that would make Hitler care about whether Jesus was a Jew or not. There was nothing in the racial antisemitism that demanded that Hitler should shield Jesus from the disdain that he heaped on Paul, for example. In *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier* (the so-called table talks) too, there are several entries that record statements about Jesus as an Aryan and Paul as a Jewish corruptor of Jesus' teachings. This is paralleled in other notes as well.¹²⁷ These were the same views that had appeared in Eckart's *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin*. The fact that Hitler constantly throughout his life, in several different sources, exempted the figure of Jesus from the vitriolic hostility that he often expressed toward the churches and established Christianity should tell us that he really admired Jesus in a very deep and sincere way.

1.9 The Religious Nature of the Concept of Race in National Socialism

In the introduction to the book *The Aryan Jesus*, Susannah Heschel stresses the importance of understanding that the concept of "race" fundamentally has nothing to do with biology and everything to do with the human soul. The racial hygienists and ideologues were very clear about this fact, and a lot of time was spent on classifying what they

¹²⁷ *Monologe* . . . , pp. 96–99, 150, 412–413; *Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde* (henceforth, BBL), Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete, R6/34a fol. 1–82 (henceforth, R6/34a), Aufzeichnungen des persönlichen Referenten Rosenbergs, Dr Koeppen, über Hitler's Tischgespräche 1941 (henceforth, Aufzeichnungen, Koeppen), "Bericht Nr. 48. Führerhauptquartier, Mittwoch, den 22.10.1941. Blatt 2: Mittagstafel 21.10" and "Bericht Nr. 52. Führerhauptquartier, Sonntag, den 26. Oktober 1941. Abendessen 25.10," pp. 60–61, 71. A commented version of Koeppen's notes has been published: Koeppen, Werner, *Herbst 1941 im "Führerhauptquartier": Berichte Werner Koeppens an seinen Minister Alfred Rosenberg. Herausgegeben und kommentiert von Martin Vogt* (Koblenz: Materialien aus dem Bundesarchiv Heft 10, 2002), p. 60.

called the spiritual properties in the people they studied. The body was just the physical representation of moral and spiritual qualities, and it was in these latter categories that the threat of miscegenation – that is, mixing with other races – could be found (this was thought to lead to moral and spiritual degeneration). Many of the leading racial ideologues, such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain, even rejected the very idea of science and scientific practice as not worthwhile. It was useless, since knowledge was an intuitive property of the Aryan race. In any case, whether they rejected ostensibly scientific measurements of skulls and bodies or not, the results of these evaluations were the same. Heschel describes the argument that racism is about biology as outdated, because it entirely misses the point that the dangers seen by these racial ideologues concerned what the body (matter) exposed the soul (spirit) to. This essential connection between body and soul is something that the racial ideologues, and later the Nazis, inherited from Christian metaphysics, where focus was on the same problem – the battle between body and spirit, between the material world and the spiritual one. It was a direct reflection of Christian mysticism and the imprint it had left on Western philosophy, according to Heschel. They also got the idea of Judaism and the Jews as a manifestation of the material, and Christianity as a manifestation of the spiritual, from Christian philosophy. Moreover, “blood,” which had a central place within the racist discourse, was the link between spirit and body, human and divine, metaphor and reality. This was a Christian view through and through, because blood in Christian theology is the link between body and soul, and ideas about the blood of Jesus and its magical qualities have an equally central place within the Christian faith. Therefore, early National Socialism’s explicit connection to Christianity is not at all strange, writes Heschel. Both were in a way naturally attracted to each other.¹²⁸

Samuel Koehne suggests the term “ethnotheism” to describe National Socialism’s conception of religion.¹²⁹ The higher on the developmental ladder that a people (*Volk*) stood, Hitler explained in a speech on July 12, 1925, the greater spiritual potential it had and the more this

¹²⁸ Heschel, S., *The Aryan Jesus* . . . , pp. 21–23.

¹²⁹ Koehne, S., “The Racial Yardstick . . . ,” pp. 576–577.

spirit came to the foreground. This spirit was the lust for life as it had been manifested in nature, and a righteous God gave the brave peoples their freedom as a reward for their bravery.¹³⁰ The historian Gerhard Ritter also noted that the connection between body, mind, and spirit was integral to Hitler's conception of race, even though it remained unclear to him exactly how this relationship looked. Antisemitism appeared to be the most important thing to Hitler, Ritter said, which he thought was a consequence of Hitler's "faith" in the value of the Nordic race.¹³¹ It did apparently not occur to Ritter, a devout Christian and opponent of National Socialism, that Christianity had been preaching anti-Judaism and antisemitism for over 1,000 years prior to Hitler's ascent on the world stage and that this fact could have had something to do with the success of National Socialism.

1.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that the ideological roots of National Socialism go back much further than 1919. In fact, National Socialism arose in a conservative religious milieu in Germany in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. By the beginning of the twentieth century, all the constituent elements of Hitler's National Socialism were already well established in German national culture and intellectual tradition. There was therefore nothing new about the National Socialism of the NSDAP per se; what was new was rather the way in which these elements were combined and transformed into the hodgepodge of ideological influences that it was. Yet, this older history is very rarely, and in fact almost never, mentioned when the National Socialism of Hitler and the NSDAP is discussed. This means that we cannot fully make sense of why National Socialism, as an ideology, developed as it did after 1919. The fact that National Socialism had these religious roots already from the start, and long before Hitler became a National Socialist (indeed even long before he was born), is important to know if we wish to understand how and why Jesus came to occupy a place within Nazi ideology and mythology. It was not something that was introduced by Hitler as a cheap propaganda trick. The adoration of Jesus as an Aryan

¹³⁰ RSA, I, p. 107 (Document 55).

¹³¹ Picker, H., *Hitlers Tischgespräche* ... , p. 22.

warrior had been rather prevalent in certain Christian theologies for at least half a century by then.

Because of the racial antisemitism that grew stronger and stronger from the mid-1800s onward, more and more Christian theologians started to question the racial status of the central figure in Christianity – Jesus. These theologians, philosophers, and Christian ideologues felt very uneasy with Jesus being a Jew. They therefore began a process of transforming him, first into a Galilean spiritual Aryan of uncertain racial descent, and then into a full-blooded Aryan. This process started already with philosophers such as Hegel and Fichte, moved further via the religious scholar Ernest Renan, and was fulfilled by philologist and theologian Paul de Lagarde and the composer Richard Wagner. Chamberlain followed in his idol Wagner's footsteps. Famous theologians such as Bruno Bauer, Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, Emanuel Hirsch, and Walter Grundmann followed their example and formed the foundations of the forceful movement to eradicate all Jewish influences from the Bible. In Nazi Germany, this project was adopted by the *Deutsche Christen*, the dominant Nazi-sympathizing church movement within German Protestant Christianity.

It was this heritage that Hitler drew upon when he spoke of Jesus as an Aryan warrior who had devoted his life to the struggle against the materialist Jews. It was the Jesus who chased the money-lenders out of the temple grounds that Hitler professed to admire and idolize. Hitler held to his views of Jesus until the very end. He kept insisting that Jesus was not a Jew and kept considering him as a role model for National Socialists everywhere. He did so both in public and, more importantly, in private. Why did he do that if the character of Jesus was not very important for him and his ideological and religious beliefs? There was absolutely no propaganda reason for Hitler to privately state this view at the end of the war if he did not really believe what he said. This is no doubt the strongest evidence that Hitler really did believe what he said about Jesus.

Because of what has been said above, historians have thus far obviously grossly underestimated the role that Hitler's understanding of, and perhaps belief in, Jesus played in the history of his political career and that of the Third Reich. Hitler did not only go from being unpolitical to political, and from an unknown to a political leader of

eventually national fame between 1919 and 1924. At the same time, he also went from being relatively unreligious to a fervent believer in God and Providence. Hitler's talk about God, Providence, and Jesus as an Aryan should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. These were very likely overlapping concepts in his mind. These two developments in his personality were clearly simultaneous and connected. But from whom did Hitler get these ideas and beliefs more directly? The two most important figures for Hitler's religious and ideological development during the early 1920s, the formative period in Hitler's transformation, were Dietrich Eckart and Houston Stewart Chamberlain.